SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 401. FOR WEEK ENDING SEPTEMBER 5TH, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

BE SURE TO KEEP IT WELL.

GIGANTIC SALE.

IMMENSE REDUCTION IN PRICES OF OUR WORLD-RENOWNED

BRUSSELETTE CARPETS.

ADMITTEDLY THE CHEAPEST IN THE WORLD. Seamless, Woven, and Reversible, Rich Turkey Patterns and Colourings, Superior Quality, with Handsome Border to match, a Marvel of Excellence and Beauty.

SIZES AND PRICES.

	ft.	in.		ft.	in.	Sale Price. s. d.	Former Price. s. d.
No. 1	9	0	by	6	0	5 6	9 0
,, 2	9	0	,,	7	6	7 0	11 0
,, 3	9	0	,,	9	0	8 6	13 6
,, 4	10	6	,,	7	6	8 9	13 9
,, 5	10	6	,,	9	0	10 0	15 6
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,, 8	12	0	,,	10	6	13 6	20 6
No. 9	15	0	by	9	0	14 3	22 6
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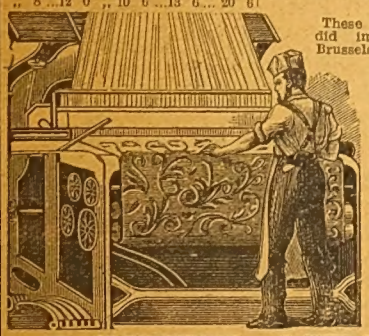

These Carpets are splendid imitations of Real Brussels Carpets, the designs having been carefully copied from the originals, both as regards colourings and patterns, so that when in use it is almost impossible, except by close scrutiny, to detect the difference. They have gained a world-wide reputation for magnificence, cheapness, and utility, having no equal. All designs are registered and deservedly considered works of art.

GIVEN AWAY.

As an advertisement for the introduction of these goods to all readers of *Short Stories*, we have decided to give away to every purchaser of the above goods, enclosing cutting from this advertisement, a very handsomely woven Hearthrug, 6ft. long and 3ft. wide, to match carpets in colours, etc.

Thousands of Unsolicited Testimonials have been received.

"92, South Grove, Brooklands. "Dear Sir,—The Brusselette Carpet has arrived safely and is very satisfactory. I shall recommend your carpets wherever I can. "Yours faithfully, J. WILLCOCK."

Mrs. C. JONES, 35, Knowl Street, Stalybridge, writes: "Permit me to thank you for the most beautiful Brusselette Carpet received from you. It far exceeded my expectations, both in value and beauty."

All goods despatched same day as order received. SATISFACTION GUARANTEED OR MONEY RETURNED. Cheques and Postal Orders to be made payable to J. HARGREAVES, *Secretary*, and crossed "Union Bank."

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PAY YOU WELL.

THIS ADVERTISEMENT.

MASON'S
EXTRACT OF HERBS
For the Immediate Production of
BOTANIC BEER.

A Nine-gallon Cask of Alcoholic Beer from a Brewery will cost you 10/6, but Eight Gallons of Beer made from

Mason's
EXTRACT of HERBS

Can be obtained for 6d., plus a pound or two of Sugar and a little Yeast.

THE
FINEST BEVERAGE
IN THE WORLD.

Inventors and Manufacturers:
Newball & Mason,
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If unable to obtain it in your neighbourhood, send 9 stamps for sample bottle; or samples of both Wine Essence and Extract of Herbs, post free for 15 stamps.

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C. BRANDAUER & Co's
CIRCULAR POINTED PENS

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Great Reduction in price to 9d. per lb. in order to reduce stock, but

QUALITY GOOD AS EVER.

NEARLY 100,000 BEDS ALREADY SOLD

TO THOROUGHLY SATISFIED PURCHASERS.

NEWHAM'S LINCOLNSHIRE FEATHER BEDS

THESE BEDS are warranted doubly purified, dusted, and perfected in our own extensive factory at Boston, Lincs., made in strong linen bordered tick. The quality, sweetness, and purity of every bed guaranteed. These beds ALWAYS GIVE SATISFACTION, and many thousands of purchasers have sent us flattering testimonials and other orders for beds. Note following prices, *which are 25 per cent. less than our recently advertised prices.*

No. 1—Single Bed, Bolster and Pillow, 6ft. 3in. by 3ft. 6in., weighing 40lb. **30/-**

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No. 4—Extra Size Bed, Bolster, and Two Pillows, 6ft. 6in. by 5ft., weighing 65lb. **48/9**

Any sized Bed only 9d. per lb., *Carriage Paid*, to any station in the United Kingdom. FEATHERS ONLY **9d.** PER LB. The trade supplied. All orders must be accompanied by cheque or P.O.O. (which, as security to purchasers, may be post-dated ten days). Send for samples of Feathers and Ticks, Price Lists, etc., which will be sent *Post Free* and need not be returned. A great reduction on three or more Beds. *Please mention this paper.*

S. S. NEWHAM & CO., Boston, Lincolnshire.

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BEECHAM'S PILLS

FOR ALL

BILIOUS & NERVOUS DISORDERS,

SUCH AS

Sick Headache, Constipation,

Weak Stomach, Impaired Digestion,

Disordered Liver & Female Ailments.

ANNUAL SALE SIX MILLION BOXES.

In Boxes, 9½d., 1s. 1½d., and 2s. 9d. each, with full directions.

Prepared only by the Proprietor,

THOMAS BEECHAM, St. Helens, Lancashire.

Sold by all Druggists and Patent Medicine Dealers everywhere.

"JUNO" CYCLES

Are the Very Best.

JUNO Safeties. Roadsters, 28lb.; Racers, 22lb.

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Send at once for JUNO Catalogue, sent post free to any part of the world, interesting and valuable to all. METROPOLITAN MACHINISTS' CO., LTD., 73 and 76, Bishopsgate Without, London, E.C. *N.B.—Every JUNO Guaranteed.* MENTION PAPER.

Send 4 Stamps and receive pair **FOLDING SCISSORS, PATENT PENKNIFE,** and Amusing Novelty Catalogue, post paid.

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CORPULENCY CURED

By a simple inexpensive self-treatment, effecting a rapid and permanent reduction without change in diet. Particulars free on receipt of stamped addressed envelope to Dr. G. A. BOYD, 14, York Buildings, Charing Cross, London.

S.S. S.S.

PEARSON'S

£100

COUPON.

No. 36

Sept. 5, 1896.

S.S. S.S.

HAIR DESTROYED.

A doctor's widow knows of a simple, inexpensive remedy that permanently destroys the roots, and will forward particulars free to all those afflicted sending stamped envelope. Address Mrs. B. D. WOOD, 4, DUKE STREET, VILLIERS STREET, LONDON, W.

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Permanently cured. A Pamphlet giving sound practical advice and particulars of a successful treatment for a rapid, simple, and inexpensive home cure, forwarded free to all upon receipt of stamped addressed envelope.—Prof. B. L. HOLT, Argyll Chambers, West Strand, London.

Dr. Mackenzie's ARSENICAL TOILET SOAP.

The greatest beautifier in the World. Produces a lovely skin and complexion, and cures spots, pimples, redness, and freckles. The finest and purest soap made. For Eczema and all irritations it is the most emollient and soothing. Absolutely harmless. But beware of the many worthless imitations. Have Dr. Mackenzie's or none. At all Chemists and Stores, 6d. and 1s. a tablet.

Madame Adelina Patti writes from Craig-y-Nos Castle: "I find Dr. Mackenzie's Arsenical Toilet Soap most excellent."

HEADACHES, NEURALGIA, RHEUMATISM

CURED SPEEDILY with **EVENIA CACHETS** (Regd.). A Safe and Certain Remedy. Send 1/3 to-day for a box, post free. D. D. BUCHAN, Priockheim, N.B.

London Agents: F. NEWBURY & SONS, 1, King Edward Street, E.C.

TOO THIN IN THE BUST.

Ladies desiring any improvement in this direction should send me stamp for free particulars of a simple, inexpensive, harmless self-treatment, whereby a *full natural bust* can be obtained. Address, in confidence, Mrs. B. K. NORRIS, 7, Addington Crescent, York Road, London, S.E.

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CURED INSTANTLY BY

BUNTER'S Prevents Decay. Saves Extraction. Sleepless Nights Prevented.

Neuralgic Headache and all Nerve Pains Removed by BUNTER'S NERVINE. All Chemists, 1s. 1½d. **NERVINE**

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with **full natural perfect Bust,** obtained by a simple, inexpensive and harmless self-treatment, approved and recommended by the medical profession. Success guaranteed. For particulars free, send stamped envelope in confidence to Madame "H. J." Oriental Toilet Co., 57, Strand, London.

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If you require a reliable remedy for the relief of superfluous fat, send for a box of my "H.D." Pills. No starvation required; you may eat and drink what you like, yet I guarantee to either sex a permanent reduction of 3lb. to 7lb. weekly. They are a harmless vegetable preparation; successful in the most stubborn cases, and improve health and figure. Their action is rapid, certain, safe, tasteless, and highly recommended. Prices, 2s. 9d., 4s. 6d., and 11s., post free, plain wrapper. PROFESSOR F. T. HOLT, Argyll Chambers, West Strand, London.

HAIR DESTROYED.

A lady who has permanently destroyed Superfluous Hairs on herself, will be happy to forward free, to all similarly afflicted, full particulars of a simple, inexpensive and harmless self-treatment. Send stamped addressed envelope in confidence to Mrs. "T. D.," 97 Strand, London.

SHORT STORIES

Edited by C. Arthur Pearson.

No. 401.] [One Penny.

For the Week ending Sept. 5th, 1896.

THE POSTSCRIPT.

A Parisian Comedy in a London Setting.

Handsome Clara Hastings saunters along the street with the tranquil and unconstrained step that comes of good health, good family, and a good figure. She left Brighton only this morning, and by to-morrow evening she will have finished her shopping and returned thither.

Clara strolls along without hurrying herself, as if she were alone in the street, with her two hands thrust into the pockets of her dark-blue dolman and her furled parasol thrust under her arm. It will be the fault of the passer-by if he does not notice the superb figure of the fair promenader and see her parasol in time to avoid an unpleasant collision.

Presently a man comes from the opposite direction, a good-looking fellow, Henry Wauburton by name, who puffs occasionally at his cigar as he stares all the women he meets out of countenance, the monster!

"By Jove," he says, "what a pretty little butterball! These girls manage to acquire an astonishing amount of style. And here comes Pansy, in her Gainsborough hat—hum, the familiarity of some of these persons is rather——"

He has run right into the parasol of Mrs. Hastings, who has been watching him for a full minute with much quiet amusement.

"Why, is it you, my dear Mrs. Hastings? What luck! And how strange—I was just thinking of you."

"And staring at the others? Do you know, Mr. Wauburton, you would have a pretty collection of plates if your eyes were photographic cameras? Do you especially admire Gainsborough hats?"

"Not at all. I have abominated them since I learnt of your dislike for them. Your dislikes are my dislikes, your preferences are my preferences, and my eyes, as well as my heart, contain only one portrait. But each time you appear to me again, I must take it again, for I always find you grown more beautiful."

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Wauburton got off his compliment well, for he meant it. He loved Clara sincerely and seriously. And she knew that widowhood was like travelling for pleasure; it is a charming way of passing one's youth; but, one day or another, one must return to one home and set up one's tent, or, rather, change it for a more permanent residence.

For some time the fair traveller had been thinking of bringing to, in the harbour of a second marriage. But, like a prudent woman, she was tacking about, examining the land and sounding the coast, before laying up at its last moorings the vessel of her independence. She studied Henry Wauburton with minute care, but with a lively desire to find him worthy of her, a desire which she had not concealed from a mutual friend, who manœuvred the threads with the patience and dexterity of a wise and experienced matron.

"Where shall I take you now?" demanded Wauburton after having obtained his companion's permission to act as her escort.

"To my house, if you have the heart for it. It is a long distance, but I am as good a walker as you are an agreeable talker. I am dying of hunger."

"If you are dying of hunger, there is only one thing to do—you must come to dinner with me."

"Sir!" said the young woman, contracting her pretty brows in affected anger, "I think I must have misunderstood you. If I did not know who you are——"

"Yes, but you know who I am. You know how I love you. Would you not go to the end of the world with me?"

"To the end of the world, yes; but not to a London restaurant, where we would be seen by some imbecile who would talk——"

"A little sooner or a little later, I sincerely hope they will have something to talk about. Be kind, my dear—madam. I ask you for your entire life—surely you can give me two hours in the meantime. Come, what do you fear? Do you wish me to serve you like a queen, not sitting down to the same table with you, erect behind your chair—or, rather, before you, so that I can see your limpid eyes, your pearly teeth, and your rosebud lips?"

"Serpent-tongue, I accept! But do not flatter yourself. The fact is, I would be less complaisant if a good dinner were waiting for me at my house, instead of such a meal as my maid can produce—and she doesn't know how to boil an egg properly. So, sir, you may thank fortune that I am a bit of a gourmet and will deign to permit you to eat also."

The difficulty was to decide upon a restaurant. It must be in a good neighbourhood, but not too prominent for fear of meeting someone they knew. After conning over the list, Clara, who had the City at her finger's ends, decided upon the Café Verrey.

"But they don't know me there," objected Wauburton, who was a man of fixed habits.

"So much the better. That will spare me the pleasure of hearing the waiters whispering: 'Never twice in succession with the same one.'"

"Ungrateful woman, you know well that I am entirely reformed. If my reformation should be to no purpose, it will lie heavy on your conscience."

Mrs. Hastings replied with a slightly reassuring glance. She was, at that moment, rather well disposed towards her Amphitryon. Perhaps her appetite had something to do with it.

Wauburton walked upon air. He poured out declaration on declaration, madrigal on madrigal.

"How beautiful you are this evening," he said.

"Truly?—this evening? Poor me! How sad I shall be to-morrow, when I have to go back to my accustomed hideousness," and she smiled happily, as if she were not uneasy at the prospect.

Wauburton made the regulation offer to unhook for her any star she might choose.

"No, sir," said she; "you need not do that yet. For the present I shall content myself with a rose to pin in my *corsage*. I could not enjoy a good dinner without flowers."

They were just passing a florist's. They entered and Wauburton selected a handful of *gloire de Dijon* roses and tendered half a sovereign in payment. The charge came to three shillings and sixpence; the florist had not the change, and neither had Wauburton. In vain the man rummaged about in his till; he could raise only six shillings; and had to go out to get change from a neighbour. Clara waited, a little surprised to see her companion haggle so about sixpence. Finally, the change was brought, and they proceeded on their way.

From that instant, Wauburton was no longer the same. He had lost his elation and seemed constrained.

"Is it possible," thought Mrs. Hastings, "that he is angry with me because I made him get me a few roses?"

But at the restaurant this man of fashion evinced a surprising parsimony. Under the pretext that he did not care for oysters, he ordered them only for his companion. He had a medium priced wine served, and offered champagne *frappé* with such evident reluctance that Clara refused it. The menu, while comprehensive enough, to be sure, was studied out in such fashion that it came well within reasonable limits. She had rather expected pompano for fish, but the waiter brought smelt.

And worse than that, Wauburton showed himself as saving of his wit and jollity as of culinary prodigalities. He was preoccupied, morose, extinguished. Mrs. Hastings, in accepting this *tête-à-tête* dinner, had committed, if not an imprudence—she knew she was with a man of many gallantries—at least a slight eccentricity. But, after this exhibition of his temperament, she felt as calm as if she had shared the repast with a schoolmaster or a gouty sexagenarian.

The dinner was carried through expeditiously; indeed, one would have said that Mr. Wauburton awaited the end of it with some impatience. He swallowed his coffee at a gulp, took no liqueurs, and when the bill, which he asked for immediately, was brought, his brows contracted as if at sight of a deputy-sheriff distraining on all his worldly goods.

Clara could not get over these niggardly ways, which would have shocked her in a man to whom she had been married for ten years. There was no doubt about it; Henry Wauburton was a miser! Shakespere forgot to add avarice to the three things which, according to him, woman detests most in the other sex. Mrs. Hastings experienced a complete disenchantment, and this ill-fated dinner left her with a heavy heart.

"However," thought she, "it is lucky that chance opened my eyes. I the wife of a man who cuts his pennies in two! Rather marry a spendthrift. But, who knows?—perhaps the poor fellow has been losing a lot of money lately."

To learn how matters stood, she brought the conversation round to hard times, bad investments, and tenants who would not pay.

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"The fact is," replied Wauburton, "that residence property is a pure luxury, and I wonder every now and then where I would be if my father had not years ago put the half of his fortune into good real-estate."

"Let us go!" said Clara, rising; "order a cab and let us separate. I must be going home, for I wrote to my uncle to come out and keep me company this evening."

Wauburton wished to detain her, but she felt no desire to stay. The charm was broken. She had expected an amusing adventure, a sort of respectable lark, a cavalier, respectful but gallant, caring for her, petting her, as he might have cared for and petted one of *the others*, not a thrifty companion who would simplify the menu and verify the bill. All Wauburton's insistence was in vain: she would not even allow him to accompany her. She entered her own house in a very spiteful humour, and, with a smile full of irony, paid the cabman who deposited her at her door. "It will be just so much less that he has spent for me," she thought.

The next morning when she awoke, she was as sad as if something in her life were changed. For deep down in her heart she had begun to accustom herself to the idea that she would one day be Wauburton's wife.

* * * * *

The day after her return to Brighton, Clara paid a visit to the head-dragon of society. It was a very unpleasant duty for her, for it amounted to nothing less than announcing to her old friend the resolution she had taken, and the news would undoubtedly be a sad blow to Wauburton's aunt.

"Come here, my beauty," cried the old lady, from the depths of her easy-chair, "and confess your sins. Ah, you little sinner, you indulge in pretty goings-on when you go up to town. Just look at the little innocent who gads about in restaurants! Well I hope you are not going to keep us waiting any longer. The entire town is talking of your escapade. Happily, someone is ready to make thorough reparation."

Mrs. Hastings was well used to the amiable old lady's pleasantries.

"I do not wish any reparation."

"Truly! What a pretty quarrel! I have seen many such. In faith, I would not wish to swear that I have not played the same *rôle* in my day. Come, my dear, what has he done to offend you? Speak, that I may box the ears of this naughty boy."

"Mr. Wauburton has not done anything to offend me. He is a very honourable man, very proper, and very respectful."

"Lord help us, we are lost! Poor Henry, I would rather she called you perjured villain. Do you know that my nephew will be crazed with chagrin?"

"It is a great honour you would do me, but——"

"He loves you so much! He used to vanish at the bare mention of marriage; now he is absolutely your slave. Well, now what is it? Do you not find him handsome enough, rich enough, young enough?"

"I did not say that. That is not the question. I am happy as I am, I do not wish to change—that is all. And it is my firm resolve."

"Unhappy boy, what a blow for him! And he expected it so little. For you must admit your last meeting was not of a kind to discourage him. Why, take that letter there on the table; I received it this morning. See how he speaks of you."

A woman never refuses to read prose when it is about herself. Clara took the letter, and was compelled to admit to herself that he wrote even better than he talked. What glowing admiration, what youthful enthusiasm, in these pages of which she was the sole topic! Her toilet, her least gestures, her most insignificant words,—all were repeated, ornamented, embellished. Never had she believed herself so witty and so charming; and she had no over-modest opinion of herself.

The poor aunt's eyes never quitted Mrs. Hastings, who softly folded up the letter with a shake of her pretty head. At bottom, she was not ill-disposed towards Wauburton for loving her as he did; she would have forgiven him many faults—all, save avarice.

"Oh," she said suddenly, "I did not see the postscript. May I read it?"

She hoped to find yet a few more phrases of admiration, a last supplement of praise. Women—and men, too—do so love to be praised! The postscript ran thus:

I forgot a detail that will make you laugh. You must know that I went out without my purse. Always thinking of nothing but her, you see. Imagine my distress—I was in a cold perspiration. Can you fancy me borrowing money of my fair guest to pay for her dinner? Well, I managed to live through it, thanks to strong nerves and two or three unhappy half-sovereigns that I happened to have in one of my pockets. Why, when we came out of the restaurant I had not enough to pay my tram fare, and it was a great load off my mind when I found I had enough to settle the bill.

Mrs. Hastings smiled strangely, without saying a word. The aunt, her poor heart torn with emotion, demanded:

"So you have decided? It is all at an end? Ah, poor boy, how shall I tell him this *no*?"

The worthy woman had no more heart for pleasantry her distress was a pitiful sight to see. And it was doubtless through pity that Clara slipped down to her knees on a cushion beside the old lady's chair, and whispered:

"Then, if the *no* is so hard to write—write *the other*."

Not comprehending a word of this, but grown fifteen years younger, the old lady half smothered her future niece, and cried, in a trembling voice:

"Write? Never! The post is not quick enough. I shall telegraph. But I cannot run downstairs. Do you, dear heart, run down and telegraph yourself."

And that is how, two hours later, Wauburton received this telegram which made him pale with joy:

"*Yes.*—Clara."

L. S. V.

RESULT OF POST-CARD COMPETITION.

No. 8.

The London guinea goes this week to Mr. J. Hopkins, 14, Upper Marylebone Street, W., and the provincial guinea to Mr. J. Smart, Shenstone, near Lichfield, Staffs. The two words, *lightly* (p. 226, col. 1, line 4 from bottom) and *tightly* (p. 227, col. 1, line 26) were equally correct, the elongated letters in each case forming six-sevenths of the complete word.

POST-CARD COMPETITION.

No. 10.

There is in this number of *Short Stories* a word of which three-fifths of the letters are turned upside down. A guinea goes to the reader who first points this out, and another to the reader living more than a hundred miles from London. *Post-cards only, please*—other forms of communication disqualified.

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THE STOLEN SELF.

THE shades of twilight were deepening in the forests, as tired and footsore I paused in one of the valleys of the Las Animas. I had left the mission of San Fernando a few miles back to push on into this region, hoping to find here a stopping place for the night.

From descriptions of the spot fresh in my mind I knew I had reached that fortilage in the wilderness of Christian faith, the mission of Santa Clara de Los Angeles.

A wild, lonely, picturesque retreat it was, too, the half-dozen deserted adobe houses and monastery, with cross and belfry rising above the tree tops, bearing the mortgage of three centuries of sun and storm, adding to the solemnity of the isolated scene.

As dead as the mission of Santa Clara is now to the touch of life, it has, like all those temples in the wilderness erected by the pious followers of the Spanish conquerors, a remarkable history.

Here the priests in their sacerdotal robes had torn down the grotesque images of the New World's benighted race and reared the cross of Catholicism. And here, when preaching friars and monks had proved themselves more "human than divine," and followed scenes of bloodshed in which strife waxed warm.

But the holy brotherhood passed the borderland of their teachings three hundred years since, and their memory belongs to the dust and shadows of a forgotten past.

I had been told an old hermit named Warlock, living in an Indian hut, would give me shelter and good treatment.

There also lived at Santa Clara one called the Mad Monk of whom many startling stories had been told.

This strange couple comprised the present population of the old mission.

As I paused upon the edge of this opening in the wilderness, I saw the remains of the old huts standing in a semi-circle on the south side of the ruined monastery, which showed even then that it must have been an imposing edifice, ere sun and storm, executors of time, had foreclosed their mortgage on its walls. As my eye ran hastily over the forsaken scene, it rested at last upon a thin wreath of smoke, curling lazily above the thatched roof of flags and boughs covering a dwelling of stone, which stood apart from the collection of huts.

In a moment a tall, gaunt figure, clad in a long linen tunic, below which I could see the extremities of a pair of goatskin pantaloons, appeared in the doorway. A mass of shaggy iron-grey hair fell upon the man's broad shoulders, but his features were concealed by dense clouds of tobacco smoke, as he complacently sucked the leaves of the fragrant weed, rolled in corn shuck.

His tunic was the same I had seen the priests wearing at San Fernando, and I realised at once he was the mad monk I had been warned to avoid. Accordingly I made a hasty retreat, but he discovered my presence almost instantly, and called to me in a harsh, grating voice, to stop.

Feeling that "discretion was the better part of valour," I darted through the fringe of bushes skirting the clearing, and quickly out-distanced my pursuer.

I had not gone far, however, when I almost ran into the arms of a man ascending from the bank of a small stream, with a bucket of water in one hand.

He uttered a low cry at my abrupt appearance, and came near dropping the vessel, while I started back with alarm. He recovered to ask:

"Whither so fast, stranger, and at that unseemly gait?"

"The mad monk!" I exclaimed. "He——"

"Ha—ha—ho—ho! been on the old fellow's premises, have you? Better keep off if you don't care to have his fingers round your neck. They say they hurt—for a little while—ha—ha! ho—ho!"

"I wanted to find a stopping place for the night, and——"

"You applied to him. Very rash act, young man. Now you have escaped him you can't do better than to share my shakedown. I don't claim it is the best you ever saw, but it is the best about here. At any rate you are welcome."

The man's tone was not unpleasant, and, though his personal appearance was far from prepossessing, I concluded he was honest, and accepted his offer.

His abode proved to be merely a hut of adobe, but while it was as humble as the mad monk's it had a cleanliness about it that made it agreeable.

"You are called Warlock, are you not?" I asked as we entered his primitive home, and he motioned me to a bench on one side of the room.

He nodded, and, as he busied himself about the evening meal, I had time to study him, soon satisfied to my mind that he had seen good circumstances some time. In fact I had been told he had been driven into the wilderness from a comfortable home by disappointment in love. His language showed he had been well educated, and there was an ease and polish about his every movement which years of isolation and estrangement from society had failed to eradicate. In the midst of my speculations, however, he invited me to partake of the simple repast he had prepared.

"Doesn't your neighbour ever trouble you?" I asked.

"Very seldom now. He and I had a little difference once, but I overcame him, and since then he has avoided me. Poor fellow! I pity him!"

"You know his history, then?"

"Like an open book. And when we have finished our supper I will tell it to you, if you care to listen. I can never eat and talk at the same time."

When the meal was over, and my host had lighted his rolled leaves of tobacco, he said:

"Now, young man, for the story of the mad monk. But first I must enjoin secrecy upon your part, for if he knew we were making gossip of his life history, he would not allow you to leave the valley alive.

"Years ago, no matter how many, Fray Augustin,

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then a young man full of zeal and God-like ambition, was sent by the church to take charge of the parish in the wilderness, Santa Clara de Los Angeles. The newly-fledged friar's heart expanded with the anticipations of the great and good work before him in harvesting the vast field of human souls ripe for his sickle.

"So assiduously did he set himself to work that soon the little monastery was filled with the dusky brotherhood, as into the shadowed hearts of the benighted race penetrated the light of Christ.

"Fray Augustin had good reason to be elated over what he deemed his success; but I am sure his joy was greatest when he looked upon his flock to behold the fair daughter of the chief of his unsophisticated worshippers, the lovely Iona, kneeling nearest to him.

"She was indeed a picture to stir the heart of the most devout follower of the Cross, and it is little wonder if Fray Augustin lost his.

"A little above medium height, she had a form as straight as an arrow, with the symmetry of a Venus. Her hair was of a glossy black, and of the texture of silk; her eyes! who can describe them? Now of a deep hazel, they seemed to melt into a liquid blue when she laughed, sparkling and glowing with a mesmeric light. Her skin of a velvety softness was dark, but it had none of the Indian's reddish or brownish hue.

"In her presence Fray Augustin forgot his vows to the good fathers, his duties to the church. Aye, he stole himself from God to lay body and soul on the altar of Love."

A low exclamation caught my attention at that moment, and arrested the speaker in his narrative. Looking up we saw framed in one of the small apertures that answered for the cabin windows the haggard visage of him of whom my companion was speaking.

I saw him beckon to me with a long, bony finger, and I drew nearer to my host.

"He is jealous because you are with me," whispered my companion. "But be not alarmed; he cannot enter here."

In a short time the wild-looking countenance disappeared, and we could hear the sound of retreating footsteps, which finally died out in the distance. With a look of relief, my companion went on with his absorbing story.

"One day the padre found Iona playing a simple game of chance.

"She started up in affright at sight of him, and would have fled had he not restrained her. He bade her resume her playing and watched her with eager interest. Somehow the plum seeds in her shapely hands seemed not such objects of evil as he had always denominated them, and as she shook them in the box before turning them on the smooth ground, the rattling was such music to his ears that he fairly forgot his dignity.

"'Away with such child's play!' he cried. 'It may do for Indians, but I'll show you a game worthy of the bishop's skill."

"In his excitement the padre shook from his flowing sleeve a pack of cards, with which he had whiled away many a lonely hour playing solitaire.

"Iona proved an apt scholar, and it wasn't long before the twain were intensely occupied in the game of Mexican monte. And this was the beginning of the end. Fray Augustin played solitaire no more.

"Finally there came a rude awakening from this idyllic dream. A messenger appeared at Santa Clara with the information that the bishop had left the head of the church at Santa Fé, to make a tour of the different missions, noting their conditions and catechising and baptising converts. Especially did the bishop wish to be remembered to good Fray Augustin, whose reports over many others had been most flattering of his success. No doubt the faithful padre would receive the promotion due to such fruitful labours.

"Here was a dilemma. Fray Augustin paced the cloisters of Santa Clara with clouded brow and heavy

The twain were intensely occupied in the game of Mexican monte.

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heart. Little hope was there for him to hold his present position, saying nothing of a promotion, should Father Aceno behold the emptiness of his church. In his despair the padre sought Iona to confide his misery to her. She listened very attentively to what he had to say, offering several suggestions which he could not carry out.

"The next day, however, she came to him with a radiant countenance, saying she had devised a way for him to fill the church.

"Fray Augustin kissed her tenderly when she had concluded, and rained blessings on her head. Already in imagination he saw the church filled to overflowing and himself receiving the bishop's praise for his good work.

"Iona's plan was to appeal to the vanity and love of contingence inherent in the Indian's breast rather than to spiritual desires. In other words to teach the catechism by a series of object lessons never before sanctioned within the sacred precincts. Forthwith the padre gave out word that he had a new game to teach his children, and lo! the monastery was crowded. What an interest was awakened!

"So carefully did Fray Augustin—hark! I hear him outside now! But he will go away in a minute. Well, he arranged his questions so that they could be answered by means of the figures on the cards, and then trained the minds of his dusky listeners to remember the reply belonging to each device This was the more easily done with the Spanish cards used by the Mexicans, which had designs of cups, swords, cudgels and gold pieces instead of clubs, spades, hearts and diamonds.

"The interest Fray Augustin had aroused in this uncommon method of teaching the catechism was, thanks

The faithful priest sank at the foot of the altar.

to his careful judgment, at its height when the bishop with his accompanying padres reached Santa Clara. With what pride he looked upon his well-filled house and with what amazement the bishop listened to the prompt recital of the catechism, you may imagine.

"'A good work, a great work,' the bishop repeated, rubbing his chubby hands with delight, unconscious of the rigid machine system to the whole programme, for the padre had found that his pupils would so persist in relying on the object lessons he had been obliged to secrete Iona behind the confessional to prompt them at each question by showing the suggestive card.

"But everything was working well and Fray Augustin's success was almost complete, when Iona, with womanly curiosity, peered out from her concealment to get a peep at the bishop and his associates. Her glance was made at a most inopportune time and—Fray Augustin read a moment later in the bishop's changed countenance that his little scheme was betrayed. He stood dumb with terror.

"When the scene which followed was over he sought the place where he had passed so many happy hours with Iona, to seek her sympathy in his downfall. Even her solace was denied the unhappy man. When the angry bishop and his followers departed from Santa Clara, the fickle maid went with them happy in a new-found love.

"It was many years ago that Fray Augustin fell from grace, but no one was ever sent to fill his place. For some unaccountable reason he still lingers round the old scene, growing more morose each year. Every Sabbath morning he has held mimic exercises in the old monastery, going through in the most minute particulars the ceremony of catechism and worship. He isn't just right here," and the narrator tapped his forehead significantly.

When he had finished his story my host became silent and he sat with his head bowed as if in deep meditation, until at last he threw himself upon a pile of dried grass in a corner of the room and I knew by his heavy breathing he was soon asleep. I lay down on the opposite side of the room, but it was some time before I fell into a fitful slumber, broken at length by the deep mutterings of the strange man as he talked in his sleep.

"The cups represent the theological virtue Faith, the gold pieces Charity, the swords Justice, and the clubs Fortitude. Ah, Iona, it is a beautiful game. We—*por Dios!* he sees! he reads it all!" and the dreamer started half to his feet to sink back with a groan.

I never hailed the appearance of daylight with so much joy, and I was looking for an avenue of escape when he arose to his feet, donned a priest's garb, and swiftly crossing the apartment, disappeared through an opening in the wall, which had been concealed by skins.

Curiosity taking the place of fear, I followed him, to find that the hut connected with the old monastery.

It instantly occurred to me that it was the Sabbath morning, and while I stood a spellbound spectator the strange man went through the exercises of the morning worship with an invisible audience. When he had finished, with an eager look upon his countenance, he addressed one seen only by him, saying:

"Ah, Father Aceno, did they not recite the catechism perfectly? Have I not done my work well?"

A voice so strange and far-brought that I could not realise it came from the mad, answered:

"You have done a good, a great work, Fray Augustin, and your promotion is assured. May God bless you."

Then, while the sound of the voice seemed to linger over the solemn scene, the faithful priest sank at the foot of the altar, and with the murmured word "Iona" on his lips they ceased to move. The Unseen Hand had borne his soul upward to that promotion beyond the dispute of mortal bishops.

GEORGE WALDO BROWNE.

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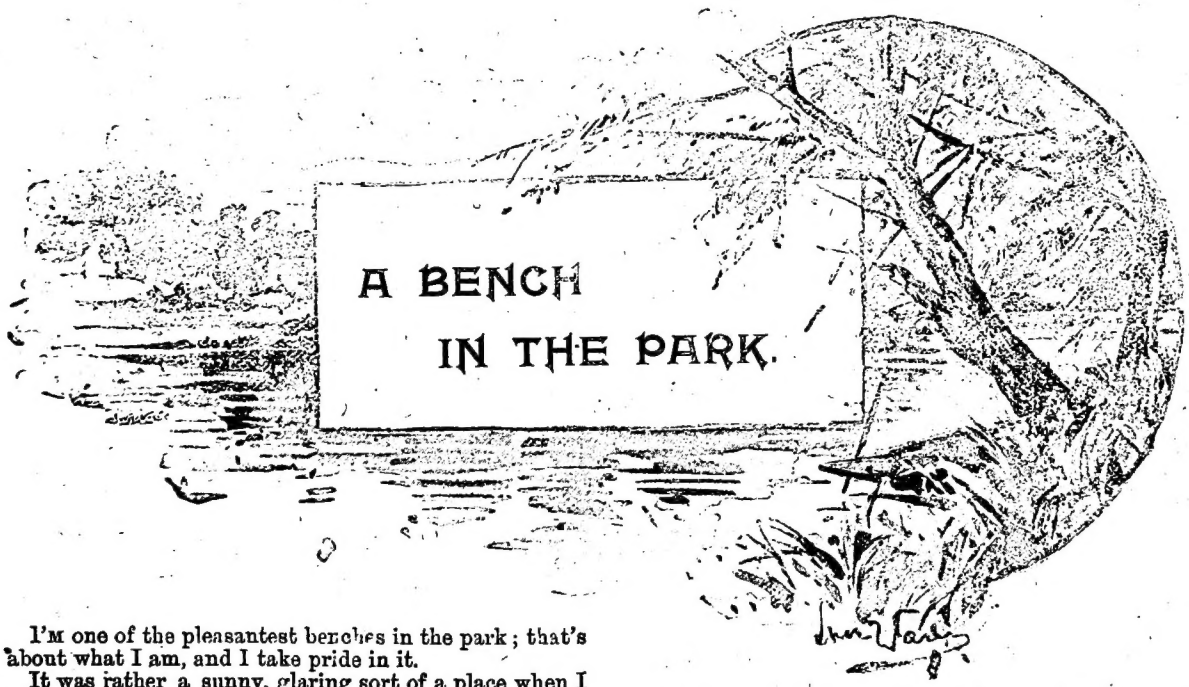

I'm one of the pleasantest benches in the park; that's about what I am, and I take pride in it.

It was rather a sunny, glaring sort of a place when I first planted my legs here, but that is quite altered now.

The shadow of a great tree falls over me, and other trees lie beyond; and between the road, with its rolling carriages, and my blessed little path are ever so many bushes green and fresh, through which one can just catch glimpses of the ladies' dresses.

Farther on you go down some steps, and come to a little winding path, where there is a spring, and where one can lose oneself in the most charming natural manner, just as though one were in the country. Not that I ever lost myself there. But I heard folks say so.

The men often stalk by, paying no attention to me, but women generally stop and try me.

I have plenty of acquaintances, and some dear friends. There are the two girls, twins always dressed alike; the mother and her four children; the old lady who brings her knitting; a plump young woman who always eats bananas and sponge cake, and leaves the crumbs and skins on me in a paper.

And my married couple—my oldest friends. I used to wonder at first why they walked so slowly, and why that broad-shouldered fellow took that little woman's arm. Now I know. He is blind.

A stout lady and a stout gentleman sat down on me one bright summer evening, making me creak dreadfully, and the stout gentleman said to the stout lady:

"Gabriella is an idiot!"

"Gabriella is a girl," said the stout lady.

"It is all the same thing," said the gentleman.

"I was a girl once," said the lady reproachfully.

"Bless my soul! so you were," said the gentleman; "and I was a boy. Dear, dear! And precious fools we made of ourselves."

After that neither of them said much for a while.

"The Rev. Mr. Spinner is one of the best men that ever lived," said the old gentleman.

"But just a little older than Gabriella," said the old lady.

"A very young man yet; not eight-and-forty," said the old gentleman.

"And Gabriella is just eighteen," said the old lady, "and Charles is three-and-twenty, and so handsome!"

"Stuff and nonsense! What's handsome in a man?"

"I thought a good deal of it once," said the old lady.

"So did I; and look at us now," said the old gentleman.

"I tell you, Spinner is just the man for Gabriella; and I won't hear another word about Charles Baldwin."

Then the old lady got up and trotted away, and the old gentleman trotted after her. And half-an-hour went by, and just the loveliest girl I ever saw, with the handsomest young man by her side, stopped just before me.

"Sit down and rest, Gabriella," said the young man.

"Oh, if papa and mamma should be up here," said the girl.

"The last place where we need fear to meet them. Now tell me all, love!"

"There's not much to tell," said Gabriella. "Pa is determined that I shall accept Mr. Spinner, and I'm afraid the dear, good man will be brought to propose, and I know he doesn't love me one bit. All the congregation expect it, and aunt and uncle, and—oh, what shall I do?"

"You know what I have always urged you to do."

"And I have always said that, though I'll never marry anyone else, I can't marry even you clandestinely. Don't be cross with me, Charlie."

"If you loved me as I love you ——" began Charlie.

But just then Gabriella began to tremble.

"Somebody is coming," she said. "Oh, dear, it's ma and pa!"

And in a moment more the shadows of those stout parents fell upon me as they walked past arm in arm, the old gentleman talking emphatically, the old lady shaking her head, and neither of them looking towards my ve...

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lovers. When they were gone, Charlie gave his arm to Gabriella, and away they went in the opposite direction.

Then I was left alone, and alone I remained for an hour. At the end of that time there came up the path a lady of forty, very prim, very plain, and very neat, who dusted me off with her handkerchief—not that that offended me—before she would sit down, and then shook her head and sighed.

"It seems so suitable," she said to herself. "Mr. Spinner is a good age for me. I respect and admire him; we have congenial tastes. I could make his parsonage all it ought to be. I was made for a minister's wife, and I should have been one if that flossy-haired little flirt Gabriella Thompson hadn't gone into the Bible class. Such a wife for a clergyman as she'd be! Oh, dear; I like him so! Well, it's my cross I suppose. I'll try not to think about it—but it's so absurd for him. Bless me! there are two men coming up the path. What will they think of me here all alone!" and off she hurried.

About moonrise, I saw coming up the path, a man. He had a thin face, with very small blue eyes, a very long nose, a very long chin, a very wide mouth, and no whiskers or moustache whatever; but a face with a mild, pleasant expression, for all that. As he sat down, he laid a book upon me, and I read upon its cover the name Spinner.

This then was the clergyman.

"I can't say that I see my way very clearly," he said. "It is plain that I am expected by the congregation to offer my hand to Thompson's daughter, Gabriella. Her father plainly desires it. They believe that I have been paying attention to her. I suppose I have. I mustn't do anything wrong. Especially I must not awaken hopes in an innocent young heart to crush them. I merely thought her a child. Still, since I have seemed to feel more, I must fulfil the promises of my actions. I fear I shall not make her happy, and she is not the woman I need. There is Miss Crump now. Ah, what a woman! Had I not unconsciously paid particular attention to poor, dear Gabriella, I should now be free to—but no matter. Duty first. Heigho." And the Rev. Mr. Spinner took up his book and departed.

"What fools people are!" I said to myself. I knew they'd all come back again, and so they did. One day Gabriella and Charles would talk, as lovers do, on me. Another, Gabriella and her mamma. Miss Crump came, too. Sometimes the minister came himself, and crossed his legs and consoled himself with the thought that he was doing his duty to Gabriella.

Once old Thompson came with him, and told him how, matters once arranged, he would buy the handsome house next the church for his daughter. And the Rev. Mr. Spinner inquired whether Gabriella was really happy in the prospective union; and Thompson—old sinner—said: "Very, only she was shy."

I tried my best to shake him off. I would have been willing to be smashed up, just to have him hurt a little.

At last I knew that the day was fixed. One evening Miss Crump came to sit on me and weep, and wandered away in the wrong direction in her agitation. And there followed her as far as my post, Spinner, who did not weep, but groaned. And the moon went up, and he sat there still with his forehead on his umbrella handle, when a shriek was heard, and there down the path, a lady, who cried:

"Oh, dear! what shall I do? What shall I do? I've lost my way, and it's night!"

And it was Miss Crump. And Mr. Spinner ran to her and said:

"Dear Miss Crump, don't be afraid," and Miss Crump sat down upon me and said:

"Oh, Mr. Spinner, I was so terrified! I couldn't find my way, and there was a drunken man in the arbour. It is dreadful to have no one to take care of you."

And he said, not meaning to speak so, but doing it involuntarily:

"If it were in my power you should never be without someone to take care of you again."

And she started to her feet, and he stood away from her. And she said:

"You are engaged to Miss Gabriella," and he said: "Forgive me. My heart spoke. I must crush it, and do my duty. Only you know my secret, now."

And Miss Crump burst into tears and said:

"We must both forget this. Poor Gabriella!" And just then two more figures came into the moonlight, and Gabriella's voice cried:

"It is Mr. Spinner."

And then she came up, leaning on Charlie's arm, and said: "Kind friend, forgive me." And he said: "For what, my child?" And she said: "I've promised to marry you, but I can't. I love you, but not that way. I wouldn't make you a good wife. Pa knows I feel so. And please let me off, Mr. Spinner. Charlie and I are going away with each other to-morrow. And before we go you will bless us and—and—marry us, Mr. Spinner, and tell pa. I know you are not in love with me, and I——" and then she looked at Miss Crump!

"This is all very wrong, I'm afraid," said Mr. Spinner. "A child should not deceive her parents. Go home, my dear."

"I will be Charlie's wife," said Gabriella, "and never part from him again. I have promised, Mr. Spinner, and I am of age to-night."

"Then it is clearly my duty to marry you," said Mr. Spinner. And next morning, Miss Crump playing the part of bridesmaid, he pronounced them man and wife.

Then Gabriella gave him a note for her parents, and they parted. And then Mr. Spinner took Miss Crump's hand.

"Dare I hope?" he said.

And she answered: "Oh, Mr. Spinner, I hardly know. This is so sudden—but——" and then—don't tell of it—Mr. Spinner kissed her and they went away together.

Vera Mappin.

RESULT OF

Jumbled Story Competition.

No. 7.

The first prize of £5 goes this week to Miss Hammond-Spencer, Glendaragh, Teignmouth, S. Devon, whose attempt in Jumbled Story Competition, No. 7, was most nearly correct. Each of the competitors whose names appear below have received £1: Mrs. E. Davis, 13, Barbican Terrace, Barnstaple, North Devon; Miss B. Clifton, 46, North Side, Clapham Common; Miss Sarah Thompson, Stafford Street, Bilston, Staffs; Mrs. Bertha Davis, Alma Cottage, Worple Street, Mortlake, S.W.; Mr. R. Collett, 116, Phillip Street, Aston, Birmingham.

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HIGH PLAY.

A Comedy off the Stage.

By G. Manville Fenn.

CHAPTER XIV.

But Still a Woman.

"Lucy," whispered Daines, as to his horror he saw that one hand clutched the bottle which was partly hidden by the great China crape mantle thrown over her arm, and this was blackened by a broad stain.

She did not seem to hear him, and he laid his hand upon her wrist. Then only did she turn her eyes upon him with look of wonder, as if surprised to see him there.

"You?" she said; "I thought you had gone."

"Great Heavens!" he whispered. "You mad girl, what have you done?"

He glanced at the policeman behind her as he spoke, but the man stood stolidly watchful of all that was going on around him, and did not seem to heed them.

"What have I done?" she said, in a low tone, and with an hysterical quiver in her voice.

"Yes, that horrible stuff. Oh, you must have been mad."

"Yes," she said, nodding her head slowly. "I was mad against her—so mad. It was too much to bear. Take me away, please. It isn't so crowded now. It's all gone off, and I want to be shut up in the dark, where I can have a good cry. There's something burning in my head, and I shall be better then."

"Oh, my poor girl—my poor girl," he whispered, and he took her arm.

"No, no; don't touch me," she said. "I'm not fit for you to come near. I feel as if I'd murdered her, and I want to die. Please go."

"I can't leave you like this," he said.

"But you can't know what I was going to do," she said, with a quick look of surprise.

"Yes, I knew afterwards—too late. Look here. When I picked up the bottle——"

He held up one blackened glove, and she drew in a sobbing breath as if in pain.

"How horrible!" she said in a whisper. "I felt obliged to do it. I got rid of you, and then I hurried out before it was over, and came and stood here to wait for them. It has often been done before. I'm telling you so as to make you hate me and keep away. I've read of it in the papers—of how one woman will throw vitriol in another's face to spoil her beauty for ever. I said I'd spoil hers and make him hate her and come back to me. Look, I've got a bottle full here. It was full of scent when he gave it to me, and I suppose I was mad. I came and waited, feeling how easy it would be. No one would think it of me. I kept it under my mantle—Rod gave me this mantle."

Daines looked at her in horror as she talked on in a low, despondent, helpless way, searching the past and seeming totally irresponsible for her actions. There were plenty of people about, and the policeman was close behind them, but no one paid any heed to the couple apparently waiting for their carriage, and Lucy went on slowly in the same halting whisper, while Daines felt that she leant more and more heavily upon his arm.

"They were very nearly the first; and as soon as they came along there Roderick saw me standing here like this, and he gave a start and looked as if he would go back. But he didn't: he came on, with her on his right, and I had only to draw the bottle from under my mantle and throw the stuff all over her face and bosom. It was so easy."

Daines groaned, and she gazed up at him with a pitying look in her pretty eyes.

"Yes, it was very horrible, wasn't it?" she said, as she

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wrinkled up her brow. "I wonder now that I could ever have thought it, but I did. I was so jealous, and I hated her so. And there she came along, looking so young and happy and beautiful, and she turned her head to him as she walked, and laughed and chatted to him, while he looked as white as a ghost and as if he knew what I was going to do."

"Oh, Lucy, Lucy!" groaned Daines.

"Yes," she said softly; "but I don't think it was me then. I felt as if some devil was in me, making me hold the bottle tightly, ready to dash the stuff in her eyes and blind them for ever, so that she should never look love into his again."

"Mad!—mad!" groaned Daines pitifully.

"Yes, I was mad then, and I stood ready—it was such a little time—and she came closer and closer; and just as she came towards me she turned and saw me as I stood there, and I suppose it was because she was so young and happy—she looked just like what an angel must be—so pure and good—and she smiled at me, just as one sister might at another; and then—it was all like a dream, Mr. Daines—she was going on down the stairs, and I stood here, seeing her get into the carriage with him."

"Then you did not throw——" began Daines, hysterical as a woman now in his excitement, and she looked at him wonderingly.

"Throw it—at her?" she said simply. "Oh, no: she looked so young and beautiful and happy. I only wanted to be happy too. No; I felt that I could sooner have drunk the stuff as I stood here; but I'm such a coward, I want to live. Everything is so beautiful when you are young and happy, and someone loves you. No, I felt I could not die. Take me home, please, Mr. Daines. I feel as if I should break down if I tried to stir alone, and this stuff is burning my poor hand so much, but," she added, with a piteous smile, "it's better so."

"Lucy, Lucy, my poor girl," he whispered, as he drew her closer to his side, to hurry her down into the brightly lit street, and then into the first turning leading north, followed closely by a couple of men pestering to show them a cab.

With a quick motion Daines snatched the bottle from the trembling girl's hand, and dashed it far out into the roadway, where it shivered to atoms, sparkling in the light, and the two men, believing it to be a paper of coin as they heard the jingle, rushed after it together. Before they had recovered from their surprise Daines had hurried his companion into a cab, where she sank back with a sigh, quite insensible before they reached the house so short a distance away.

CHAPTER XV.

Olive's First Taste of Money Matters.

"Rod, dear," said Olive one morning at breakfast, "what am I to say to the Frasers?"

There was no reply. Braetoun sat at the other end of the table, tapping the cloth with a letter that he had refolded after reading, and looking now flushed now pale.

"Rod, dearest," said Olive, smiling at the absorbed look in her husband's face.

Still no answer, and he sat gazing straight before him, his chair wrenched on one side, and the lines deepening in his brow and about the corners of his lips.

Olive rose quietly, but he did not notice it, and with her eyes sparkling she crept round behind him, and with a girl's merry smile upon her lip, she leant forward with extended hands, and placing her left over his eyes, caught up the letter with her right.

He gave a violent start, throwing back his head and striking her sharply upon the mouth; but without heeding this, he leapt up and caught the letter from her hand.

"Oh, Rod, dearest!" she cried, as she clapped her hands to her mouth and the tears began to gush from her eyes as her face grew convulsed with suffering. "Rod, Rod, how could you?"

"How could you be such a fool?" he cried savagely. "How dare you do such a thing?"

"Rod, dear," she cried, amidst a burst of sobbing, as she applied her kerchief to her lips, which were bleeding freely, cut as they were against her white teeth, "how could you? Look!"

"How could I?" he cried fiercely as she held out the deeply-stained cambric. "How could you be such a silly hoyden, playing tomboy's tricks like that? Recollect who you are, who I am, madam. How dare you snatch one of my private letters like that?"

"I—I did it, dear, in play."

"In play!"

"I spoke twice, dear," she said piteously, "and you made no reply."

"In play! You, a married woman! How dare you?"

"I dared, dear," she said, flushing a little now, "because I was your wife, and I thought we had no secrets one from the other."

"Then, please think differently for the future."

"I did not mean to annoy you, dear," she said, looking at him reproachfully; and then the girl spoke again, her lips quivered, the tears showered down, and she held out her handkerchief. "Oh, Rod, what have I done that you should punish me like this?"

"I didn't punish you. It was an accident—entirely your own fault. How was I to know that you had crept behind my chair like some silly schoolgirl, instead of my wife?"

"I—I am—very sorry," she faltered, trying hard to master her emotion, but the rebuff was agonising, the pain in her cut lips nothing. He was keeping something back from her, holding her at a distance—so soon too. And now, instead of being tender and ready to comfort her, his words sounded brutal.

"If you had asked me, I would have shown you the letter. There, take it, and read it," he cried. "It isn't from a woman."

He threw the letter on the table, and walked to the window, to place his foot on a chair, and stand looking out.

"It isn't from a woman."

The words seemed to echo in her brain, and she stood gazing after him, wide eyed and wondering, but with the pain she suffered greater than ever. Not from a woman! Why should she think it was? How could she think it was? His words sounded like a reproach—they were such as he might have spoken if she had made some cruel, jealous accusation.

But she crushed down her agony, driving away the thoughts that came rushing through her, and remembering that he had seemed irritable and strange during the past two or three days, she smiled sadly, and without so much as glancing at the letter, she followed him to the window, and laid her hand deprecatingly upon his shoulder.

"Rod, dearest," she whispered; "only a few minutes ago and I was so happy. Please, please don't be angry with me, love. Here is the letter. I don't want to see it, if you do not wish."

"Oh, read it now," he cried without turning his head; and a spasm of pain convulsed and made piteous the sweet young face that looked so passionately towards him.

She made no reply, but stood holding out the folded letter, whose envelope, face downwards, was upon the table.

To give her time to read, Braetoun took out his cigarette case, lit up, and began to smoke, all without turning his head, making believe to be very much interested in what took place in the square.

"Well, have you read it?" he said, breaking the silence at last.

"No, Roderick," she said sadly. "I do not wish to read your letters."

He faced round, to find her standing pale and statuesque,

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holding out the missive, and with her nether lip beginning to look swollen and disfigured.

"But I told you to read it," he said sharply.

She darted a piteous look at him, full of appeal, for his anger, which had been calming down, seemed to increase, and, half blinded by the tears which filled her eyes, and quivering with the new emotion from which she suffered, she slowly obeyed, opening the folds, and began to read the very brief, curt note, which was as follows:

Eaton Place, Wednesday.

Dear Sir,—When you honoured me six months ago by marrying my child, I gave my solicitors the fullest instructions to make it plain to yours that the arrangements over the marriage settlements were final, and binding in every way. They secured an ample income for Lady Braetoun, in which you, as her husband, would, of course, share. I regret to say that in any case I should not consent to alterations being made, and that even had I felt disposed to be so weak, certain matters that have come to my ears of late would have fixed me in my original carefully thought-out intentions.

With regard to the other portion of your letter, I am obliged by habit to refuse. I make a point of never advancing money on interest to any friend.—Your obedient servant,

Isaac Emsworth.

The Right Hon. Lord Braetoun.

It took Olive some minutes to grasp the import of the letter, which she read twice, and then looked up wonderingly at Braetoun.

"You have been asking my father to alter something, Roderick, and to lend you some money."

"It says so, plainly enough, doesn't it?"

"Yes, dear," she said humbly; "but why?"

"Why?" he cried savagely. "Why? Bah! how can you be so childish! You know I want money."

"You said you did, dear, but I believed you were joking. I thought we had plenty."

"Ah!" he cried, with his irritability increasing. "You go on spending and never troubling yourself. Joking? Great Heavens! When I am pestered to death!"

"Oh, Rod, dearest," she cried, forgetting her own suffering as she read his in the sunken cheeks and careworn expression. "I am so, so sorry; and papa has refused to help you?"

"You see he does."

"But he can't have understood, any more than I did. I thought, indeed, that my money, I mean the money settled upon me, would help to make you rich."

"And all the time you are a perfect child over money matters. There, I can't explain these things to you. I am ill and worried—Olive, don't cling to me so. Can't you see I'm hot and worried, and that my nerves are all ajar?"

"Yes, dearest," she said tenderly. "Sit down, no, lie down on the couch a little while, and tell me, darling. You musn't be worried about money when you are ill. I know I'm very stupid about it, but I have never learned anything. Papa always said that women had nothing to do with cash accounts: that was men's work. There, you'll be more comfortable now," she continued, as he threw himself on the breakfast-room couch; "now tell me how to help you, dear. It is absurd for you to be worried. How much do you want?"

"Oh—there, I told your father, and he sends me back that cold, brutal letter."

"No, no; don't call it that, darling. Perhaps he was a little cross, and someone at the Cape had sent him a tiresome letter by this mail. He is very much bothered sometimes, and I know he loses a great deal of money, but he never would tell me anything about it. Now, be a good boy, and tell me at once," she said, as she bent down over him and pressed her lips upon his forehead, and then started as she saw the effect, and hurriedly and with a slight shudder made believe to hold her folded handkerchief to his brow, for she had left the mark of blood where she had kissed him.

"There, don't do that," he cried impatiently. "My head's hot enough as it is."

"Is it, dear? A poor darling head. Wait a moment."

She ran to the chimney-piece, took a scent bottle, and hurriedly saturated her kerchief with the pungent contents, bathed his brow, removing the last trace of her loving kiss.

"Now, Rod, dear," she said, as she furtively touched her own lips from time to time, "how much money do you want? I have—yes, over seven pounds."

"Seven devils!" he cried so furiously that she started away in alarm, but turned back with a loving smile, which looked terribly pathetic as she caressed him.

"Rod, my darling," she cooed over him; "don't, dear; you frighten me. I know you don't mean it."

"Then you shouldn't talk such idiotic nonsense. Can I pay seven thousand pounds with seven?"

"Seven thousand! That's a great deal, dear. Why, what have you been doing?"

"Never mind. I have it to pay at once, or I shall be sold up or something. Be quiet. Don't paw me about."

"Rod!"

"Well, there. I don't mean that, but I can't bear it now. Go and finish your breakfast, and let me think."

"No: I want to think for you, as your wife should. Why, I have plenty of money, Rod. I mean, we have. What is mine is yours, and you shall have all you want, dear."

"How?"

"Why, I'll give it to my own dearest husband, of course; anything to make him happy."

She choked a little as she said this, and the tears would come, in spite of her efforts to hide them.

Her convulsed face moved him a little, and he spoke more gently.

"You mean well," he said, "but you are a perfect infant still over these matters. Your marriage settlements tie up your money so that I can't touch it, and you can't either."

"Then what's the good of it, dear?" she cried wonderingly.

"Ah, what indeed!" he cried. "I was a fool ever to consent to it all. I didn't know it would be so tight as it is."

"I remember now," she said; "I have read about money being tight in the City."

"In the City!" he growled, "it's tight everywhere. Hang him! he was too clever for me."

"Do you mean the man you owe the money to, Rod?"

"No, I don't. I mean your old grab-all of a father."

"Rod, dearest, don't, don't, please. You hurt me. Dear papa would not do anything that was not for my—for our good."

"For your good, as he calls it, yes; but he has made a confounded mistake this time, and so he'll find out."

"Has he, dear? Oh, I am sorry."

She rose and rang the bell, making Braetoun start up on his elbow.

"Here, what are you doing? Don't do that. Olive! What are you about?"

"Trying to do something for you, dear. You seem so ill."

"No, I won't have it. You're going to send for that confounded, croaking raven, Murray. I don't want him here. He does me more harm than good."

"No, no, no, dearest."

"He does, I tell you, and he comes here a cursed deal too often. I won't have him hanging about and talking to you in his smooth way."

"I'm sure he is very, very kind and patient and nice."

"Oh, is he?" cried Braetoun angrily. "I won't have him fetched."

"Did you ring, my lady?"

"No," cried Braetoun fiercely.

"Yes," cried Olive firmly. "Tell them to send the brougham round as quickly as possible. Go at once."

"Yes, my lady."

"What are you going to do?" cried Braetoun, with his

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face looking drawn and strange. "I won't have you go to fetch him."

"I am not going to fetch him, Rod, dear," said Olive firmly. "I think you want a different doctor."

"I don't want any doctor," he snarled—"Yes, I do."

"It is your anxiety about money makes you ill, and I am going to papa at once."

"What! You are going to your father!" cried Braetoun excitedly. "What for?"

"To tell him he must untie some of my money," she said quietly, "because you want it and are in great trouble. There, don't fret and trouble any more, dearest. He does not know how ill you are, and how worried. I won't be long. He will do anything I ask him. There, look up at me as you always do, dear. I—I—I can't bear you to speak to me as you did just now. I know, darling. Don't say anything. It's all past now; but don't, pray, speak to me again like that. You don't know, dearest, how you hurt me. There, it was because you were so ill and worried."

"Yes, yes," he said hastily, as he drew her down and kissed her, "that was it—worry and illness. I was not myself."

"But you are now," she cried, clinging to him lovingly, and sobbing over him for a few moments. "There, the sun has come out again," she said merrily, "and I am going to fetch you a big bag of money to pay the horrible ogre who has been troubling you. And now, dear, you are not to leave that couch till I come back."

"Oh, I don't know. Hadn't I better come with you to face the old man?"

"No, sir, certainly not. Papa would do anything for me, and perhaps he wouldn't for you. He has known me longer, sir. There, lie still, and try to go to sleep."

She hurried out of the room, looked in five minutes later to nod to him playfully, and then with cruelly aching heart drew her veil tightly over her face, and went to the door just as the brougham drew up.

"Poor wench!" muttered Braetoun, as he turned his head to the wall. "Curse it! how bad I do feel. But I'm not going to have Murray here so much. I believe he'd poison me if he dared. Comes here a deal too often. But she is a little angel of a girl, after all, and I behave awful bad to her. But it's all fate—hard fate too, for I do try my best to run square."

He lay thinking for a few minutes, and then winced at a keen throb of pain which shot through his head, one which influenced the tide of his thoughts.

"He'd better mind what he's about. Why, I'd shoot him as soon as look at him, that I would."

He tried to divert his thoughts to another channel, and lay musing.

"Ought I to have gone with her after all?" he thought. "No: she's right. I should have been like a red rag to the old bull. He'll do it for her, like an old fool. Wish I'd told her it was twice as much. Regularly sold me over those settlements. Who would have believed that everything could have been tied up so tightly? Why, I'm a regular cypher. Rigdon regularly laughed at me. Said they were useless as securities for any advance. He's a cursed old fool, but he must have known something beforehand. Made some inquiries, I suppose. Talked to Murray. Thick as thieves. Ah! what a stroke of fate—what a cruel position—to be regularly under the thumb of a man like that, regularly at his mercy. I believe I'm the most unfortunate beggar that was ever born."

CHAPTER XVI.

Emsworth Makes a Confidant.

Braetoun would not have lain there in Chester Square if he could have known all that took place.

Murray's brougham drew up at the door in Eaton Place, and, on alighting, the Doctor was shown at once into the dining-room, where Emsworth was seated at breakfast, evidently making a hearty meal; and Murray's face showed a slight trace of annoyance as the door closed.

"Ah, my dear Murray!" said Emsworth, holding out his hands and wincing as he moved. "Very good of you to come. Had breakfast?"

"No: I came on as soon as I received your message."

"Bless you, my lad! Don't look very bad, do I? Touch the bell, will you?"

Murray rang, and then said gravely:

"What is it, Mr. Emsworth? I am pressed for time."

"Yes, I know. Lot of poor beggars forming *queue* at your door: but they must wait a bit. You must eat or you can't work. Hot plate for Dr. Murray."

This to the butler.

"Now sit down and talk to me."

"Yes. What is wrong—not"—with a gasp—"Lady Braetoun?"

"No, no, no, my dear boy. She's well enough. I'm the sick man, I tell you."

The Doctor drew in a breath as if relieved, and Emsworth looked at him searchingly.

"Thank you for that, Doctor. I like it. I'm glad to see that my darling has someone beside me who loves her."

"Lady Braetoun won my esteem from the day I first met her, Mr. Emsworth."

"I know she did, sir, I know it; and before I begin to groan over my troubles I'm going to tell you something. Murray, I've been making a fresh will."

"Indeed!" said Murray coldly; "then I hope you have not remembered me in it."

"But I have, sir," said Emsworth with a chuckle. "Not in the regular way, though. Short a time as I've known you, it has been long enough to make up my mind what to do. Of course, Olive inherits the bulk of my savings and winnings, but she'll want protecting."

"Who should protect her but her husband, sir?" said Murray frowning.

"My friend, sir, the man I trust, the man who will act to her as a brother. You."

"Mr. Emsworth!"

"Hush!—Set the things down, and mind I am not interrupted."

The butler, who had entered with a tray, quickly laid a fresh cover and left the room.

"Now eat your breakfast."

"No, not now," said the Doctor excitedly. "You must alter that will, Mr. Emsworth. I cannot consent to undertake this duty."

"Yes, you can," said Emsworth sternly, "and you will, for her sake."

"No, sir. I cannot put myself in so false a position."

"You can, and you will, sir," said Emsworth, stretching across the table and seizing the Doctor's wrist, to grip it tightly and hold on, drawing his breath heavily, and unable to repress a groan.

"My leg—my leg!" he muttered.

"Yes: what is it? A touch of gout?"

"Oh, some cursed thing of the kind. Forced to have two men to give me my bath—oh, I had it hot; don't look horrified—and to dress me. Then hang me if they weren't obliged to get this arm chair and carry me down like a blooming Guy Fawkes on the Fifth of November. Here I am, and I can't stir. But I can eat, and I want to see you eat too."

"I dare say I can soon relieve you."

"Yes: of course you can; but wait a bit. I want to relieve my mind first. You'll do what I have said. You'll be my sole executor?"

"It is impossible, sir."

"It is not impossible, and you must do it. I've devoted my life to making a fortune for that girl, and when I'm gone she must have someone to watch over her interests."

"Yes, sir; but I am not the man."

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'But I say you are. I know you like her so well that you'd do anything sooner than see her suffer."

"I would, sir," said Murray, in a deep voice.

"Then why do you hesitate?"

"I hesitate for her sake."

"Then you are wrong. Look here: it's of no use to beat about the bush. I've had several little hints lately that I'm growing old. This is one of them. I've to die some day like a man, and I want to go to my long sleep in peace, feeling that I have left everything as right as I can for my darling child."

"You have a fortune to leave her, sir," said Murray coldly, "and you have chosen a husband for her to protect her."

"Yes, and a pretty devil of a mess I've made of it," cried the old man, flushing. "I thought I was very clever. I thought it all out, and I wouldn't have listened to anyone who had tried to dissuade me."

"No, I am sure of that, sir."

"Don't taunt me about it. But there," continued the old man, with a groan: "it's of no use to cry over spilt milk. It's done, and I've got to make the best of it. But, Murray, why didn't you tell me what a scoundrel he was?"

"How could I, sir?" cried the Doctor passionately.

"And that he was in such a state of health?"

"Mr. Emsworth, you cannot deny that you knew almost as much as I did about Braetoun, and that you have believed his sweet young wife would entirely redeem him. I believed this too."

"Yes. I suppose I knew all this," groaned Emsworth; "but I wouldn't quite know it. I was carried away by my vanity and pride, and the way in which that old hen harpy of a mother worked me round her finger. There, it's of no use to hide anything from one's medical man. I was dazzled by the title, birth, and position. It was too much for me, and every objection which rose before me I knocked down with the idea that Olive would redeem her husband from all the past. One moment—I am in a good deal of pain. Tell me what it is—not something worse coming on? I can't afford to die yet, Doctor, but speak out the truth."

He dabbed his wet brow with his handkerchief, and sank back in his chair, Murray immediately devoting himself to his fresh patient for the next few minutes.

"Well," said Emsworth at last, rather piteously; "what does it mean—short obituary notice in the *Times* about one of Samuel Smiles's self-help men, and a quiet substantial funeral?"

"Not for many years to come, I hope, sir," said Murray quietly. "It is a form of gout undoubtedly, and it must not be trifled with. You have been doing too much lately, and suffering a great deal of mental anxiety."

"More than I ever did before in my life, my lad. Things have been very bad at the Cape, and I fought the trouble through and won; but then down upon me came the trouble about Olive's husband. Murray, my lad, you've relieved my mind partly about myself, for I don't want to die yet; I'm not tired enough of life to wish for the long sleep, and I want to make a long fight yet to redeem my child's position. When I go promise me that you will take my place as my executor."

"It is impossible, Mr. Emsworth."

"It is not impossible, man. Look here; I've sent for you to do me good. Don't begin by doing me harm. I've got worry enough upon my mind as it is. For a couple of months past, one on the top of another, little and big, the worries have been piling themselves up, about that scoundrel, Braetoun. He left off for a time, but he has drifted back to his old games. The turf has greater attractions than his wife; he has been making ducks and drakes of a lot more money, and got himself deeply involved, and now——"

"Does Lady Braetoun know all this?"

"Not yet, man," whispered Emsworth, inserting a crooked finger in the Doctor's buttonhole, "and she don't know that the miserable hound has gone back to some wretched woman—some actress he used to know at Brompton. Confound him! I should like to shoot him for the scoundrel he is."

Murray sat gazing straight before him, with his brow knit, his teeth set, and his hands grasping the edge of the table.

"You knew what a scoundrel he was," said Emsworth, in a deep voice. "You ought to have told me. You ought to have fought against me, and insisted that I had made a wrong choice. You ought to have done all this."

"And if I had, Mr. Emsworth, you would have called me a meddlesome slanderer, and have persisted in spite of all."

"Yes," said the father with a groan, "I should, my lad, I should. Oh, Doctor, Doctor, what miserable fools we clever men are!"

"Yes," said Murray bitterly, "even the most able."

"There, I can't take her away. I should be making worse of it. Why, she has all her stupid old father's weaknesses. If I were to go and tell my poor darling that he was the scoundrel he is, she'd turn upon me fiercely, and defend him to the last. She's as stubborn as I am. Believe ill of him? Not she. It would take something very strong indeed to make her think he was anything but the husband she swore to love."

"She may win him to the true course yet," said the Doctor hoarsely.

"Never. Can't you kill him out of the way next time he's ill? Such men are of no use whatever. I know you hold him together, and that he has you to thank for such health as he has. What do you think is the last thing?"

Murray made a gesture with one hand as he gazed despondently before him.

"I told you he has got through all the ready money I supplied them with to start them—all gone, and since then he has been setting some scoundrel of a solicitor and money-lender to work to turn her settlements into cash."

"But you will not allow that?" cried Murray excitedly.

Emsworth's hand came down heavily upon his arm.

"Got you!" he cried.

The Doctor stared.

"Now look me in the face, Murray, after that, and tell me you will not be my executor, and watch over my child's interests when I am gone!"

"But you have the money properly tied up?"

"I've done all I can, but who knows what dodges and tricks may not be tried in dealing with a weak woman who is ready to believe and can be cajoled. Tell me now that you refuse."

Murray was silent for a few moments' bitter struggle, as he thought of the position he occupied, and the dangers and temptations that might come. Then he said quietly:

"I cannot refuse, Mr. Emsworth. There is my hand."

"No, I am right this time, my lad. Thank you. That has done me more good than any medicine. Look here," he continued, taking his pocket-book from his breast. "You did not know it was so bad. It has come to this. Read that."

Murray read the letter, and handed it back.

"What have you said to him, sir?"

"I have told him in the plainest words I could write, that he will not get a penny from me, and I'm waiting to see what card he will play next."

There was a tap at the door.

"Who's there."

"Beg pardon, sir," said the butler; "I wouldn't have interrupted, but my young lady is here."

(To be continued.)

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THE WAGER WON.

THE Empress had just ended her game of chess one evening at the Winter Palace, Petersburg.

"It is enough," she exclaimed, turning to her lady-in-waiting whose duty it was to supply her with a fresh pair of gloves at the beginning of every game: "I shall not play any more. I will have my revenge to-morrow, M. le Marquis."

"Your Imperial Majesty has had it already," replied the Marquis Strogonoff, who was the popular and accomplished French Ambassador. "If you could but see the deep contrition of my heart for having had the presumption to defeat you, you would find yourself amply revenged."

The young Empress smiled graciously and rejoined: "Very well, but I prefer deeds to words. That is what I try to impress upon my people. *Apropos*, you know how we Russians pride ourselves on the strictness and alertness of our detectives, and how nothing escapes their keen vigilance. As you seem to doubt the watchfulness of my subjects, I requested that the very next case of detected smuggling be at once made known to me."

"To doubt would be treasonable, your Majesty," said the Marquis, with a smile. "Do let us hear the details."

"Count Lazareff has just been arrested and detained on the frontier for smuggling all kinds of contraband articles from Paris, which were most ingeniously hidden in the linings and roof of the carriage; and the Emperor, to encourage the detectives, has distributed among them the heavy fine of 800 roubles which the Count had to pay. What do you say to that, Marquis?"

"I can but say, your Majesty," he answered with a shrug of his shoulders, "I can but say how clumsy the man must have been to fail in such a simple thing."

"Simple thing!" repeated the Empress with a slight look of surprise. "I do not think you would find it so easy to deceive our inspectors."

"Will your Majesty give me leave to try?" the Marquis quietly asked.

"Oh, no," she answered, with a smile. "It would be of no use. You know that your person and property as Ambassador are sacred, and therefore you would not be a fair test. I would wager, however, this diamond ring that were you to pass our frontier as a private individual you would not succeed in smuggling in the veriest trifle without being detected."

"I accept the challenge," replied the Marquis, with a graceful bow, "and as I am shortly going to France on urgent private business, I shall avail myself of your gracious permission, return to Russia as a private individual, and subject myself and property to the most rigorous search of the custom-house."

"You have accepted my challenge," the Empress rejoined. "Remember, Marquis, we shall have no pity on you."

* * * * *

Great excitement prevailed at the small frontier station on the road from Königsburg to Petersburg. The officers of the custom-house were on the alert, for they had received orders from headquarters that when the travelling carriage of the French Ambassador should pass through that day it was to be most carefully searched and examined, and even the person of the Marquis was not to be spared. Such were the Emperor's orders, and, unusual as they were, they must be obeyed.

It was a bitterly cold day, the snow lay deep on the ground, and the custom-house officers, who had been doubled in number, were congregated around the stove, warming their sheepskin-lined kaftans, and speculating on the rich prize which would undoubtedly fall into their hands.

"Count Lazareff's roubles were nothing to it! By St. Alexander, the Emperor is a kind father to us," and the men stroked their long beards and gulped down bowls of hot tea. But hark! There is a faint tinkle of bells and the swift sound of horses on the crisp snow.

"Here he comes!" cried one of the men, jumping from his warm seat. The rest quickly followed, and as the Ambassador's covered sledge with its four horses drew in sight it was surrounded by the band of officers.

Respectfully touching his cap, the head man accosted the Marquis and apologised for the intrusion, but he had received orders to examine carefully the carriage effects of his Excellency, and must trouble him to alight while the search was being instituted.

The Marquis, who was luxuriously reclining in the warm folds of a magnificent black-fox cloak, roused himself at the words, and replied that there was no occasion to apologise.

"Alphonse," he cried, as his valet came to the door of the sledge, "take care of Fidele, and see that the poor little thing does not catch cold coming out into this frosty air."

The Marquis then stepped out and hastened into the custom-house, followed by Alphonse, who had carefully wrapped a rug around the French poodle. The poor beast, who had been snugly seated on a pile of warm furs, evidently disliked being disturbed, for it gave vent to its displeasure in a short bark.

Like eager birds of prey over a rich prize, the examiners gathered around the sledge, and began their search in the most systematic manner, ransacking every possible place of concealment. Even the cushions and linings were not spared, to the indignation of the coachman and valet, who looked on with sullen eyes not daring to interfere, but muttering at the folly of their master in permitting such an outrage.

As yet they had not discovered a single contraband article, and more eager became the search, until at last the baffled men had to abandon it.

The Marquis meanwhile was warming himself at the stove, with stoical indifference, sipping hot tea and stroking Fidele's curly head. Nor was his equanimity disturbed when they approached him and intimated that he and his two servants must submit to being searched. "Very well," said he. "Only I warn you your trouble will be in vain, for you will find nothing. But fulfil your orders by all means."

Disappointed by previous failure, the men made the

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personal search as strict as possible, but it was without result. One of the inspectors even approached Fidele, and insisted on examining the rug with which the dog was covered, as it might contain something hidden in its folds. Fidele gave a low growl at being thus disturbed, and its master took it up gently, and said: "Poor Fidele is not accustomed to be treated roughly. Well, you have found nothing. I told you so. And now, I suppose, we may proceed on our journey."

The chief examiner, bowing low, assured his Excellency that he would not be further detained, and he was soon in his sledge once more, carrying his pet dog in his arms. The horses pawed impatiently, and the merry bells began to tinkle a chime of departure. In a moment the swift sledge was out of sight, leaving the disappointed custom's officers bewailing their ill luck.

* * * * *

It was again a brilliant evening scene at the Winter Palace. The young Empress was surrounded by her court circle, and when the Ambassador approached, not a little curiosity was aroused as to the result of the wager. It had become a lively topic of speculation since his departure, and bets had been high on both sides. Even the Emperor who generally kept aloof from such trifles, was amused at the incident, and was curious to know how the Marquis would explain the affair as the baffled search at the frontier had been promptly communicated to Petersburg. The Empress felt triumphant, and naturally concluded that the Ambassador, rather than run the risk of failure, had given up the idea altogether.

"Welcome back to Petersburg," she exclaimed, graciously extending her imperial hand, and smiling as he bent down over it. "What news from Paris? I fear you did not find anything there worth smuggling, if I may trust the report of the officers, who seem to have treated you most unmercifully, and searched every possible corner."

"Your Majesty certainly has no occasion to find fault with your faithful subjects, for I can bear witness to the keenness of their eyes and fingers," the Marquis replied, with a slightly amused smile at the eager looks of the circle of auditors. "But still, I did bring back a trifle, which perhaps you will allow me to show you. My valet is in the ante-room, as I could not well intrust it to other hands, and perhaps your Majesty will give permission to him to enter here."

With an incredulous look, which was reflected on the faces of her court, the Empress gave the required order; and as Alphonse entered with Fidele in his arms she could not suppress a laugh, in which her whole circle joined.

"What a pretty little dog!" she exclaimed. "But it scarcely comes under the head of contraband; and if this is the only thing you have brought from Paris I am afraid you have lost your wager, and my diamond ring is safe."

The Marquis did not look disconcerted, but taking Fidele from the arms of Alphonse, he placed it on the ground.

"Now, Fidele, good dog, make your bow to her Majesty," and in the most absurd way the dog kept nodding its head several times in succession.

"Now, Fidele, die," said the Marquis, putting his hand on the dog's curly head. Fidele wagged his tail, gave a hoarse bark, and in another moment, to the surprise and horror of the assemblage, its head rolled on the carpet.

There was an involuntary scream from the ladies, and even the Empress cried out: "Oh! what is that?" as the Marquis bending down over the headless body of Fidele, quietly drew forth from the opening at the neck a long, white roll of lace.

Unfolding it carefully, he held up to the astonished gaze of those present an exquisite dress of the far-famed Chantilly lace so finely wrought as to be almost priceless. A murmur of admiration was heard from all. Gracefully kneeling before the Empress, the Marquis presented the lace.

"Will your Majesty pardon my presumption, and kindly deign to accept this souvenir from Paris?"

"How very beautiful it is!" the Empress exclaimed, taking the delicate fabric in her hand. "It is truly a magnificent souvenir. Rise, M. le Marquise; you have indeed fulfilled your word and fairly won the wager. I herewith acknowledge myself defeated," she added playfully; and, taking the diamond ring from her finger, placed it in the Ambassador's hand.

"I will not part with it but with my life," was the gallant Frenchman's answer, as he rose to his feet and put the ring on his finger.

"That is indeed a wonderful dog," said the Empress, turning to Fidele. "I certainly never saw anything more true to life, and I must give you credit for the clever way in which you eluded the vigilance of my officers."

Fidele now became an object of great interest, and its head being replaced, it had to go through its various accomplishments of barking, nodding its head, and wagging its tail, all of which, owing to the ingenious mechanism concealed in its head, it performed to perfection. It was not surprising that it had escaped detection at the custom-house.

ABRAM ISAACS.

JUMBLED STORY COMPETITION.

No. 10.

Six Prizes, one of £3 and five of £1 each, are offered to the competitors who most nearly put together the lines of the story appearing on the next page in their original order. Each line is complete in itself, but the title is jumbled up.

Cut out the lines separately, and paste them up in what you consider to be their correct, readable order on one side of the paper, and send the story in an envelope marked "Jumbled Story," to *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

All competitions to be in by Monday, September 7th.

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JUMBLED STORY. NO. 10.]

EVER BEEN IN THE FOG.

THE messenger-boy: "Any answer, sir?

Harry: "What is it? Oh!" (Before him stands a arch over the door—ding! ding!—where's James?—He's fixing the——and, oh, my darling, I don't know where to take you, for, you see, the florist is at work in an awning frame out here."

Maud (same): "Why, Patrick says he can't ever stow the minister's fee—tied up in a brown-paper bag!"

Harry (somewhat discomposed): "This is jolly, I vow." I'm just t-t-tired to—de-death———"

Maud: "Now, dear, we'll have a nice, delightful chat; to-day, and I've so many things to tell you."

Harry: "Oh, Maud."

Maud (staying Harry's impassioned rush): "No, not so exasperating! I've been going through it all day, and here, you reckless boy! Don't you notice that carpenter?

Harry: "The dining-room?"

Maud: "The presents are displayed there."

Harry (hopefully): "The music-room?"

Maud: "No; the caterer's men have possession of the parlour, and then——"

Harry (sarcastically): "Perhaps the kitchen——"

Maud (quite seriously): "It's a perfect pandemonium!"

Harry (same): "Or the stable?"

Maud: "Dear!"

Harry (aside): "Just the place for me, then." (They enter.)

Seamstress (opening door): "If you please, Miss little sole-leather? I think perhaps we'd better——"

Maud (tearfully): "Oh, now you're getting cross—Oh, excuse me, Mr. Spooner. Thought it was the man we've had with that dress. When it was sent home we wear both or neither or none at all, and be hanged to fitted again, and——"

Voice (over banisters): "Has he come, James? Tell him!"

(Enter down the stairs, with a dove-like swoop and recedes.)

Servant (opening): "Well, you are here at last, are you? (Rings.)

Maud (springing up): "Oh, dear, it's no use! Just listens to the following):

Harry: "Hum!"

Voice: "Oh! It's only Mr. Spooner, Maud. What can have become of that man? Now, Maud——" (Voice approaching.)

Voices: "Maud! Miss Maud! Maudie!"

Harry (in despair): "Well, I'll go. But——"

Bridesmaid (outside): "I'm awfully sorry to disturb your toes." (Drops heavy scantling almost on Harry's little studio! But it's a mass of confusion. for every-foot)

Maud's mamma (entering hurriedly): "Maud! Maud, would you step upstairs? That back needs to be creams—and your Paris hat is put—in the ice-chest, please pack the handkerchiefs in—a salad-bowl or soup roses, bring 'em here—and drive tacks through the dead floral bell; it's made of—one hundred chicken croquets. Would you—oh, good evening, Mr. Spooner!—would I shouldn't think you would—and I don't blame you, it's Harry——"

Servant: "It's Mr. Spooner, ma'am."

Maud: "Any way you like, mamma—I don't else. There! There!" (Brief bliss, broken by little kiss——"

Harry: "No! Off with you. (Exit boy.) You see, (Maud slips out, remaining some time, while Harry hear them!"

(Outside Maud's house, and rather dark. Harry is!" (Reads letter and tears it up.)

Indistinct figure (which has collided with Harry): There! forget all about it, and we'll talk about something voices).

Maud, The bridesmaid, the bell, and various voices: in the bottom of some trunk, I'm sure—if those are sprinkled with—Mr. and Mrs. Snyder's best wishes, "There's two dozen, I think, of white silk—lilies for the messenger-boy, silently holding forth letter.)

Harry (petulantly): "I know well enough what this instant? I don't quite understand how I am to——" may for ten minutes, when re enter Maud.)

Maud: "Oh, Harry, you can't think what trouble Charley has never been best man before, and he's simply wild to-night with all this bother—oh! papa's found that—— Coming, mamma!" (Exit).

(Harry comtemplates ceiling with what patience he frightfully nervous about it. This is the fifth note to-ments, and she sends—three cakes of toilet soap—so you put all those light things into the tin box or the tureen—for there aren't bags enough to—flavour the thing not immediately wanted is put there."

Maud (re-entering): "Oh, Harry, isn't this awful?"

Harry (remorsefully): "Poor little girl! There! for, as you know, we've only seen each other four times and all my things are being packed upstairs, and——"

Maud: "That's settled. Now, to begin again. It's time to-morrow we'll have been married just seven hours where it ought to be—ding! ding!—you must see the white scarf or a pearl-grey one like mine! Let him away—you're laughing at me, you wicked—but I'm so sweet——"

Harry: "Well, we'll be at peace now. Come, one rustle, Maud, all smiles and happiness at seeing Harry.) much I love her—hear her say how much she—uh! going!"

Maud (shrinking away): "Ow!"

Harry (in joyous soliloquy): "Eight o'clock! At this delicious. I want to see her once more—tell her how mum—and set off by—four dozen dessert spoons—and centre of every one—ding! ding!—Mrs. Smith's compli-him——"

Maud (tenderly): "But remember, dear, that I love you, Maudie, but won't you please come out here for an and a quarter. Jove! Doesn't it seem queer—and, that, and the women from madam's are in the library getting ready to prove it!"

Second indistinct figure: "Hi, there; look out for you just as much as if I weren't so awfully busy—"Beg pardon, sir, but I couldn't see. We're putting up Eh! Confound you: take care where you are day from him. He's asking whether he shall wear a care." (Exit mamma.) "And, as I was saying, with the——"

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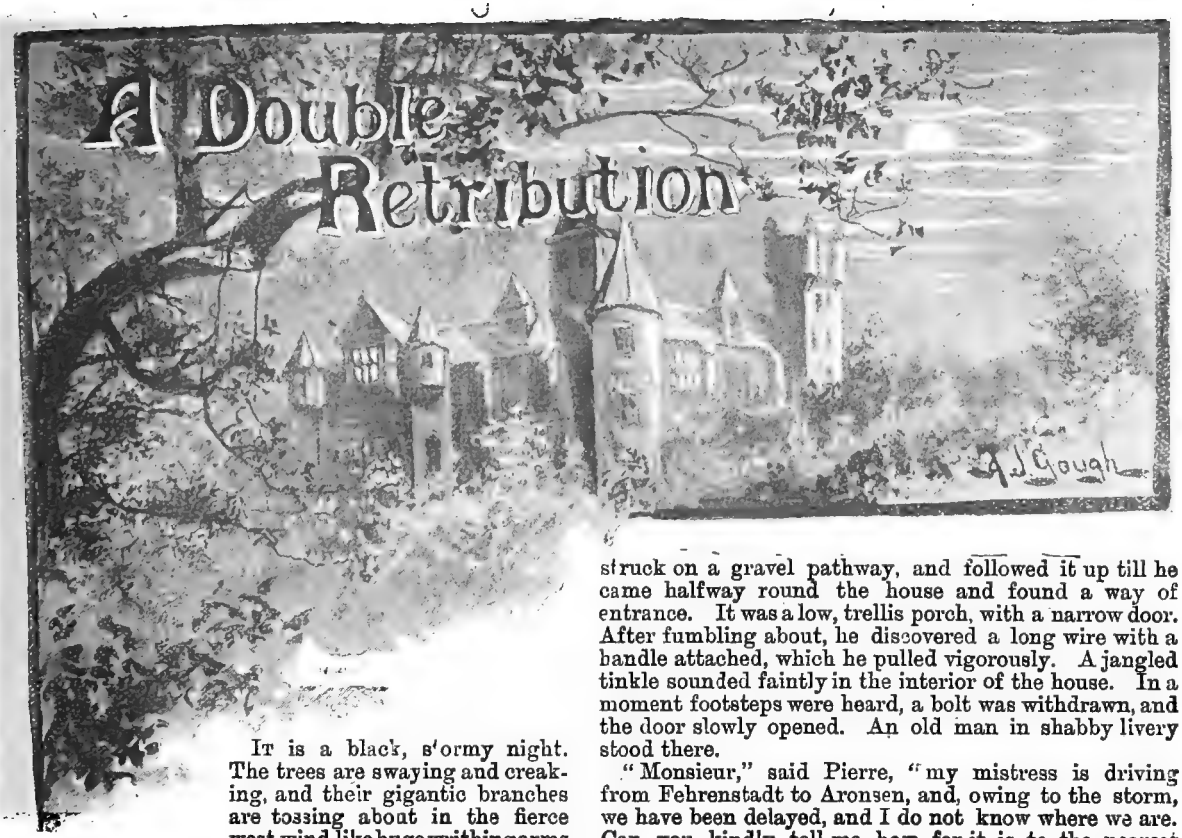

It is a black, stormy night. The trees are swaying and creaking, and their gigantic branches are tossing about in the fierce west wind like huge writhing arms stretched out in intersected confusion across the shadowy road which winds for a couple of miles through a thick forest of pines. A heavy rumbling is audible in the distance, speedily resolving into the sound of carriage-wheels; it comes nearer and nearer, and then suddenly ceases. The carriage stands still. The horses are tired, and need no staying hand as the coachman scrambles down and walks from side to side, peering into the dense blackness which envelopes them on every side.

"Pierre! what is the matter?" rang out an impatient though melodious voice. The window was let down with a jerk, and a woman's head looked out.

"Madame," answered the man, deprecatingly, touching his hat, "the horses are tired. There ought to be an inn near, but I fear I have passed it. It is so dark and stormy that the road seems unfamiliar and I cannot make out where we are."

"Drive on very slowly. I will look out, too, and the first house we come to, you can get down and seek information. If it be possible, we will stay there the night."

The coachman mounted and did as he was ordered. Presently there seemed a break in the density on one side of the road. There was a clearing in the forest and a glimmer of light a hundred yards away.

"Pierre!" came in sharp tones again, "go and see what that light is! The horses will stand still without you."

Pierre knew from experience that remonstrance was vain. His way was through thick underwood and long grass, and he dreaded some unknown danger with every fresh step. A long, wandering house of two storeys soon stood up in black relief against the murky sky. He struck on a gravel pathway, and followed it up till he came halfway round the house and found a way of entrance. It was a low, trellis porch, with a narrow door. After fumbling about, he discovered a long wire with a handle attached, which he pulled vigorously. A jangled tinkle sounded faintly in the interior of the house. In a moment footsteps were heard, a bolt was withdrawn, and the door slowly opened. An old man in shabby livery stood there.

"Monsieur," said Pierre, "my mistress is driving from Fehrenstadt to Aronsen, and, owing to the storm, we have been delayed, and I do not know where we are. Can you kindly tell me how far it is to the nearest inn?"

"Humph, *du lieber Gott!*" the old man said; "there's no inn, as I know of, within six miles of here, and it is a ticklish road in the dark. Wait a bit, I'll go and speak to the master."

He soon returned, carrying a lighted lantern. "The Herr Graf sends his compliments to the lady, and will be happy to receive her as his guest till the storm is over. I will come down with you."

The two men walked with rapid steps down the drive and appeared on the road some twenty yards ahead of the carriage. Whether it was the unexpected noise in the distance, or the sudden gleam of the lantern light, the horses started and plunged, then galloped with ringing hoofs straight along the country road.

"*Mon Dieu!* My poor mistress!" cried Pierre, and he flew, as if possessed, after the runaways.

The lady, fortunately, had alighted some moments before, as Pierre's absence made her restless, and now she stood speechless, as she saw first her carriage, then her servant, disappear from before her eyes.

The old man shook his head as he looked round and mumbled to himself; then swinging his lantern high, he caught sight of the tall, erect figure standing motionless by the roadside.

"That must be the lady herself," he muttered. "If you are the lady who owns that vehicle, you had better come straight along to the house with me," he continued, aloud; "the horses can't be stopped, and your man will soon find his way back."

"There seems nothing else to be done," she said decisively; "go on with your lantern and I will follow."

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The man obeyed. They came to the house and stepped into a broad, low hall, with many doors leading from it.

"Where is your master, my man?" the stranger asked; "tell him that Baronin von Reichstein is the name of his guest, and she thanks him for his courtesy and would like to see him."

"Yes, *gnädige*," replied the old servant, "and will you please to take a seat in there, and I will send my wife, the housekeeper, to you." While speaking, he opened a door to the right, and the Baronin walked in with stately step. It was clearly but not brilliantly lighted, and was a comfortable room, with low lounges and deep chairs, covered with an old-fashioned chintz; polished floor, with a few skin rugs lying about. She shivered, however, as she walked down the room, and, after throwing aside her travelling cloak and bonnet, she sat down by the newly kindled log fire. She was a woman of fifty, at least, well preserved, and with a slender, even youthful figure. Her hair, though snow-white, was luxuriant and waved. Her features were delicately chiselled, and her skin, though somewhat wrinkled round the eyes and mouth, was like marble, and the reflection of the fire-light gave almost a youthful shimmer to the eyes, and a rosy tint to the cheeks.

"There ought to be an inn near."

She took off her gloves, and putting her elbow on the arm of the chair, she leant her head on a little white hand, sparkling with the gleam of costly rings. She must have been a very beautiful woman in her youthful days, and possessed that regular type of beauty which seldom changes its character, even in fading years. Heinrich, the man servant, forgot to close the door, and, after knocking and receiving answer, he entered a room on the opposite side of the hall. It was a small library, and seated at a writing-table was an elderly man, with iron-grey hair, straight features set with classical rigidity, and, though strictly handsome, cold, passionless, hard. He turned round and faced the servant, who delivered the stranger's message, supplemented by certain explanations of his own.

"What name did you say?" asked the master, in even tones.

"Von Reichstein, Herr Graf."

There was a slight pause.

"Ah, very well. Send Martha here, and I will give her orders about our guest."

Heinrich bowed himself out.

A strange look came into the Graf's face. He got up and began to pace slowly up and down the room.

"It cannot be possible!" he murmured, clenching his hand; "after all these years, has it come at last? There can only be one Baronin von Reichstein. I must see for myself—be convinced that the name is not a mere coincidence."

So saying, he opened his door noiselessly, and, making no sound with the soft slippers on his feet, he stealthily crossed the hall and gazed from the shadow right into the other room.

The Baronin, as though instinctively conscious of an unknown observation, changed her attitude, and her eyes moved uneasily from one object to another. Herr Graf withdrew further into the shadow, still watching her intently.

"It is she! Oh, Heavens, how little changed!"—his features softened and worked convulsively for some seconds, then set into the same unbending rigidity as before—"the same fair, false mask! How many more lies has it told since it lied my life's happiness away? She shall sleep in that very room to-night. It cannot be coincidence that makes to-day the anniversary of that memorable occasion."

With a cruel smile that might have curdled a brave heart, he went back to his old seat at the writing-table, his eyes glistening with excitement, and a dull red spot on each pallid cheek.

A shrivelled-up, little old woman, with a basket of keys, now entered and approached him timidly.

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"Get some refreshments ready, Martha, and take them to our guest in the morning-room. Light a fire in the north bedroom; the Frau Baronin von Reichstein will sleep there to-night."

Martha started as the Graf spoke. "The north bedroom, did you say, sir? But——"

"The north bedroom," he replied emphatically; "mind there is no mistake about it. Uninvited guests must be content with what is given them."

The old woman still hesitated, but lacking courage to speak, she shuffled out of the room. "Well, I never!" she said half aloud, "the room that has not been used for years, and which folks vow is haunted. The master is a strange man, and no mistake."

* * * * *

The Baronin von Reichstein had retired to her room. In spite of the large log-fire burning briskly in the open grate, there was a chilly, damp atmosphere hanging about the walls and furniture, which was of a heavy, sombre character. The bed was one of those ancient canopied four-posters of early days, and presented a funereal appearance. The Baronin shivered the second time that night as she glanced round the room. There were two wax-candles lighted on the dressing-table, and their flickerings created uncanny shadows which lurk in every corner. She rang for more lights. When two more candles were brought by the old woman, who looked pale and frightened, she placed them on the high wooden mantelpiece above the fireplace.

"What can make me so uneasy to-night, I wonder?" she thought impatiently; "those stupid horses, and that idiotic coachman! How could I divine that I should be stranded in the middle of the forest, at the mercy of a man who seems either to have outlived the manners of ordinary society, or never to have had any at all. The last premise seems the most likely. That reminds me, I meant to have asked his fossilised old retainer the name of her master."

So communicating with herself, she moved about examining the furniture, and finally drew a low couch, which seemed to have got in there by accident, to the side of the fireplace. Then she loosened her hair, drew it into one thick plait, removed a wadded silk quilt from the bed, and then, throwing herself on the couch, she arranged the coverlet over her.

"It would be an impossibility to attempt sleep in that hearse," she thought, viewing the heavy bed; "I wish it were morning."

She tried to sleep, but everything conspired to keep her awake. The thought of her coachman and horses did not disquiet her, but the rain beating on the window panes, the curtains moving with the wind, the shaking of the door in the socket, the falling embers of wood—all these worked upon her imagination and took on a weird importance. She sat up, and, putting the coverlet round her shoulders, rested her feet on the fender and gazed into the fire. She hated to have time like this for thinking. She had lived through many strange and sad experiences which she never had wish or will to summon from the past.

By dint of leading a busy, restless life, full of variety, friends, and pleasure, wrapped up in her only surviving son, who was married and happily settled, and to whom she was hurrying, she never allowed regretful moments to take her unawares, and if threatened with a sleepless night, always took a sleeping-draught, which effectually wooed and won the fitful god. To-night she was powerless; her luggage somewhere out in the forest, sleep refused to be conjured at will. She tried to concentrate her mind on the bright home of her son, but all kinds of gloomy shadows and voices of a dead past rose to defy her in those silent hours of the night. With sheer force of will she drove them back into their secret lairs for a time, but presently out they crept again—the stealthy, ugly, shapeless phantoms—on they came like a phantom tide, crowding, mounting, accusing, overwhelming—an offspring begotten of remorse and shame, suppressed and concealed for more than a score of years.

She rose impatiently, shook herself, and began to walk about the room. She went to the alcoved window, drew

She drew aside the curtain.

aside the curtain, and looked out. The storm of rain was over, and through the swiftly-scurrying clouds were glimpses of stars and of the unfathomable firmament beyond. Just then the moon shone out clear and still. She was not a timid woman; an idea suddenly struck her, and she went and blew out the candles. Then she sank into a large chair by the window, with the curtain drawn half-way back.

A momentary lull, and back again came those relentless shadows, sad and terrible. She was gazing abstractedly into the darkness. Suddenly her brow contracted, and she pressed her hands tightly over her eyes.

"Am I demented?" she cried; "*his* face is the last I should ever expect to see in this world, and yet I seem to see it distinctly, stern and angry, as I saw it last. It

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was only an illusion!" and she gave a deep sigh, and looked out steadily again.

Nothing to be seen but the neglected shrubs and straggling grass, with a black background of lofty pines; a wild, weird scene enhanced in expression by the fitful moonshine and moaning wind. From one mood she dropped into another—the retrospective. Scenes came before her to which the former mood seemed but the prelude, and passed in shorter time than they take to describe.

The first is laid in an old garden, gay and trim, which has many winding walks and hedges of yew. There is a fountain, and close to its gleaming marble rim are two figures—a man, tall, stately, bearing erect, in velvet coat, lace ruffles, buckled shoes, and a young girl, in the picturesque costume of the Trianon period, satin petticoat, bunched paniers, and full sleeves of flowered silk, a soft muslin kerchief drawn loosely round the graceful shoulders, leaving the marble pillar of the soft neck bare and cool, little high-heeled shoes, and a coquettish fan. A large, drooping hat topped the dainty head, which was dressed high, with tiny curls straying over the rosebud ear and delicate neck. Her face is turned away.

The man is bare-headed, and the breeze lightly lifts his thick chestnut hair from a broad, noble forehead, beneath which burn two passionate eyes which are bent with yearning intensity on the slender figure of the girl as she seems to sway like a willow in the wind. He puts his arms out slowly; she does not draw away; then he draws her with a fierce rapture into a close embrace and devours the sweet, downcast face with hungry, burning kisses. "My Ermantrude! Mine now and for all eternity!"

A break in the vision.

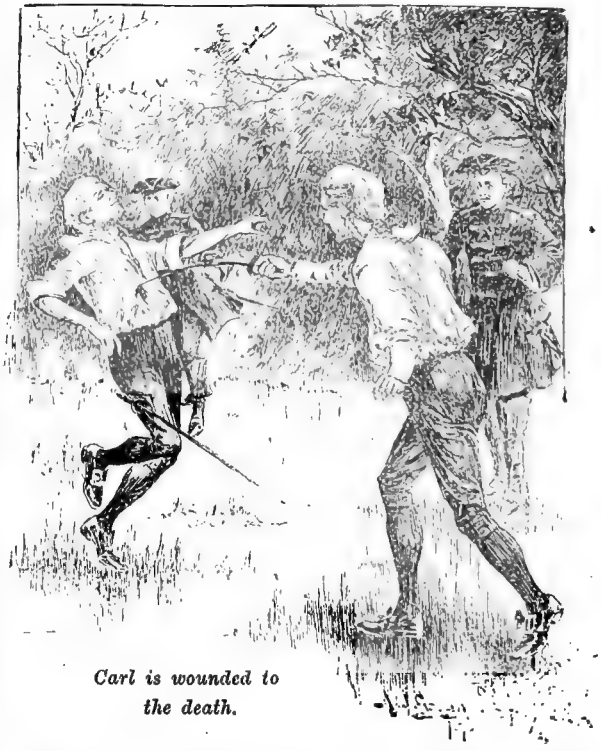
The scene changes, and a second picture gradually forms on the inexorable camera of retrospection. Two people are walking down an avenue of linden trees. The girl we saw before in the garden. Her companion is not the same; he is more massive than the lover of the last scene; his expression less intense; hair darker, eyes smaller. He is pouring out avowals of love and devotion. The girl turns her head aside. By degrees he wins her attention; she allows him to kiss her and to put a sparkling ring on her finger. There is a narrow footway on one side of the avenue beyond the line of lindens, and an unsuspected observer has accompanied them step for step. It is the man with the chestnut hair and passionate eyes; he is breathing quickly with suppressed rage and excitement, and, as the final seal of the engagement ring is put to the compact, he rushes forward, with a muttered curse, and confronts the lovers with flashing eyes and face inflamed with jealousy. "Hypocrites!" he struggles out hoarsely.

It was a tragic, a dreadful scene. The girl gives a sharp cry, remains as if struck for a second, and then flinging her arms up and pressing her hands over her ears, she flies back the way she came as if for bare life. The two men were brothers. Rudolph, the first lover, was poor and proud; Carl, the younger, rich and powerful. Carl looked at his brother in amazement. "How dare you make love to my betrothed!" grasped out Rudolph. Now it was Carl's turn to burst out in frenzied indignation; and hot and strong, bitter and stinging, were the words they hurled at each other. The passion displayed was too deep for depiction. They parted.

The third picture is slowly unfolding.

The brothers meet again at early dawn in the depths of the forest, where no ear can detect the clashing of swords, and no arm of the law can intervene to avert the duel which is to prove of deadly result to one or the other. The survivor is to retain his bride. The seconds are officers from a neighbouring garrison, over-zealous in their temporary office, and unrighteous in the antipathy each bears to the opposing party. Carl is wounded to the death. Rudolph relents, and vows never to return to the beautiful Ermantrude who has proved false to both.

The Baroness von Reichstein only guesses at that



Carl is wounded to the death.

third scene. She never saw either lover again after the fatal encounter in the avenue, but heard of the duel and Carl's death. To this day she turns sick and faint at the smell of the linden trees. Even now, as she reclines in the low chair by the window, with tightly pressed lips and contracted brow, the sickly sweet odour seems to float before her sharpened senses after the lapse of thirty years' silence.

She shudders, and rises to leave her seat. She will try and sleep, now she has allowed these ghosts of a buried past to hold sway for a time; they will surely rest now. An indescribable something arrests her; she cannot move, not even raise her eyes. She sinks back. Still feeling that same eerie sensation of an invisible barrier, she looks up, and becomes conscious of a light in the room. Just at first she forgets the candles are extinguished, and then a chill of terror overtakes her. There is a cold, phosphorescent, bluish light, filling the room mistily, dimly, and brightest round the bed. She dares not breathe; a dreadful oppression weighs her down; she wonders if she is going mad, and a sickening horror seizes her. All at once, after one rapid glance all round, she gives an agonised gasp and loses consciousness.

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This is what she saw: On the bed the clothes were disturbed, showing the outlines of a massive figure; on the pillow, with closed eyes, and a greenish pallor on the cheeks and forehead, was a rigid ghastly face. There were stains of blood on the linen coverings, and by the bedside stood a shadowy form in the act of pouring some fluid from a bottle into a glass—the lady at the window here opens her eyes, and with fascinated, horror-stuck, staring look, every nerve strung, every limb tense, she followed each detail of the ghostly scene. Phantom-like figures pass in and out of the room, noiselessly and rapidly.

Still that quiet figure on the bed sleeps on; still the shadowy figure by the bedside holds the glass in its hand. Now the figure of an aged man enters, misty and uncertain; profound grief is shown in his very attitude; he stands gazing on that quiet figure with a sorrow-striken face that would melt the stoniest heart. Now he stands erect, seems to be listening to someone speaking at his side; as he listens his countenance changes, his features become convulsed, an awful look enters his face. He lifts his hand high up, and, with eyes fixed into space, seems to pour forth torrents of words.

The figure on the bed moves, rises—"My God!" muttered the lady at the window—endeavours to clutch the old man's arm, opens his mouth to speak, but suddenly falls back on the pillow, and from his side, which now reveals surgical bandages, spreads a bright, crimson stain, which spreads and spreads, till the whole bed seems flooded with red, and a little red stream trickles to the floor and collects in a dark, ominous pool. The old man staggers, falls to the ground, and is borne swiftly by shadowy figures from the room. Confused forms pass to and fro; the light becomes indistinct, the shadows less frequent and more dimly seen; in another moment all has vanished, the gruesome vision is past, only the moon shines into the room, throwing long, silvery beams across the bed with its undisturbed linen and snow-white pillows.

But the door remains open, and a tall figure stands on the threshhold. It advances, like the figure of a relentless fate, sinister, strange, and seems to seek something. The Baronin's horror-struck eyes are still staring into space. Evidently they take in this fresh apparition as part of the awful pageant. She begins to speak:

"You, too, Rudolph? I expected you. Do not look at me so sternly! I did not mean it. How could I tell what would be the ending? I swear I never knew till to-night. I was so young then. A—a—h!" with a long convulsive shudder, "look at the blood," and she draws her skirt aside; it is only the red silk coverlet that has slipped from her shoulders. "Don't go till I tell you what my life has been—how I have been punished. I married, Rudolph! Yes—to try and forget. I have had six children, bonny boys and girls. Tony, the eldest, lived till he was six; then he was drowned in the lake. Pretty little Adèle was poisoned with berries gathered in the woods with a careless nurse. My handsome Eccard was killed by a fall from his horse. One of my babies fell down the well in the Reichstein Schloss, and was picked up dead. Two boys grew to be twenty; then one was killed in a railway accident, and now I have only my Ernst. He is married, Rudolph, the only one left. I am going to him to-morrow. Would to God I were with him now!" She sighed quietly. The words fell mechanically, as from the lips of an automaton.

"Your husband? Is he alive?" said the figure.

She did not think it strange that the phantom spoke. "He was killed in a storm ten years after we were married—twenty years ago. For one life, six have been taken from me. My sin was great, but my punishment greater, for I loved *you*, Rudolph, and lost you for ever!"

The tall, erect figure never swerved. It was Graf Rudolph von Wilding himself—no apparition. It was the white outline of his face that the Baronin had seen through the window and taken for an illusion. He drew back when he saw himself observed, and only appeared again to remain an intent, awful spectator of the ghostly phenomena that had just taken place.

"Baronin Ermantrude von Reichstein! The dreadful scene you have just witnessed repeats itself every anniversary night of the real tragedy that was enacted here thirty years ago. I knew this, and for that reason caused this room to be prepared for you to-night." He spoke in icy, stern tones; she put up her hand as if to ward off a blow, and bent her head with a faint moan.

"After our unnatural duel my unfortunate brother was carried in a dying state to the forester's house close by. My father was sent for, and learnt at the death-bed the cause of the fatal quarrel. Standing there, he cursed that false woman, cursed all who loved her, and all whom she should love." The bent head, and stretched-out arm at the window sank low, and seemed to press heavily on the arm of the chair. "He poured forth curses which roused the dying man to protest. His bandages burst! death was instantaneous. My father died the next morning. I bought this house, and here I have lived and shall live to the end of my days. No detail will escape my memory if I live a thousand years. This is the room to which he was carried, that the bed on which he lay, this the very night on which he died."

He paused. There was a solemn, ominous silence in the room. The moon still shone through the alcoved window. The Graf's dark form was deeper in the shadow than before. No sound came from the crouching, motionless mass leaning over the chair.

"And now, Baronin Ermantrude, are you satisfied?" he continued. "True, you have suffered, but that is just. Let me remind you that the result of those sins, which our own folly and blindness lead us into, remains our constant, our nearest companion, till death deliver us from the burden."

He turned to go. The Baronin never moved. Whether it was a faint touch of pity, a sudden stirring of remorse, or a vague misgiving which arrested his steps, he hesitated, came forward a few paces, hesitated again, his face working with conflicting emotions. She was but a woman after all, and had suffered much.

"Frau Baronin," he said gently. No word, no motion in answer to his call. "Ermantrude!" he whispered hoarsely. Silence still prevailed. He took one stride forward and bent over the drooping figure, lifted her up, and laid her head back on the cushions.

Just then a silver moonbeam struck right across the pale, chiselled features, revealing wide-opened eyes, agonised and appealing, already fixed with the appalling, terrible stillness of death itself. Ermantrude, the sinning, the suffering, was dead! Rudolph started violently. It was not possible! He seized her hands; they were icy cold to the touch. He bent his head in agony of suspense to listen for the faintest heart-beat. All was still, intensely still.

"A three-fold murderer!" he muttered; "my brother, my father, and now my—Ermantrude!" he suddenly shouted. He knelt on the floor by her side; he fondled

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the cold little hands, laid them against his cheek, and kissed them; he murmured broken, unmeaning words of love and endearment. Was it fancy, or did those fixed troubled eyes gradually soften into a quiet calm? Suddenly he came to himself again. He stood up, passed his hand over his eyes, looked long and fixedly on that pallid face, pressed a lingering kiss on the marble forehead, then swiftly left the room.

Listen! What was that? A shot, loud and piercing. It echoed clearly through the stillness of the early dawn which had risen fresh and calm, after the stormy night. The sound did not rouse the two old servants. A few hours later, the rays of the morning sun lightly touched the rose-sprays hanging over the library window, then shot downward through the window into the room, and hovered over a still, lifeless figure that lay stretched out on the floor, face upward, one hand clutching a pistol, the other thrown across the chest.

A still, lifeless figure that lay stretched out on the floor.

* * *

Heart disease, the doctors told Ernst von Reichstein was the cause of his mother's death. He adored his mother, and was almost broken-hearted when the terrible summons reached him. She had carefully concealed her weakness from him, but had known it herself for the last few years. No one could account for the second death in that house of terror that night. There were strange rumours about for months afterwards, and the heirs of the last Graf von Wilding would not enter the house. It was closed up, and allowed to fall into decay and ruin.

Ada Inchbold.

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The Editorial Mind.

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AN EYE FOR AN EYE.

I.

"Have you read about poor Detective Forrester?" asked my friend, John Hawthorne, late of Scotland Yard, as we sat chatting, after supper, in my rooms.

"Forrester?" I answered, "no; what has happened to him?"

"He was attacked and nearly murdered by some Marylebone roughs last week," replied Hawthorne; "we never thought he would recover, but his splendid constitution has pulled him through, though he'll never be the same man again, poor chap."

"What was the cause of his being so brutally injured?" I asked.

"His clever handling of the Slater Coining Case," replied the ex-detective, "you know how smartly he captured that fellow Slater, thereby breaking up one of the most expert counterfeiting gangs London has ever harboured. Well, the rest of the crew managed to make good their escape, but they determined to be revenged for the conviction of their chief, and, with that motive, the ruffians contrived to waylay Forrester in some lonely place and beat him savagely about the head with sticks and life-preservers until they all but killed him.

"Poor fellow," continued my friend, a tone of deep sorrow in his voice, "I wish to Heaven I had been at hand, for he saved my life two years ago, when, through just such a motive as that which almost caused his death, I literally hung within an inch of eternity."

"You never told me about such an occurrence," I said reproachfully.

"No, I did not," replied Hawthorne. "Months passed before I could recall its happening without a shudder. But you can have the story now, if you would care to hear it."

"Shall be delighted," said I, refilling my friend's glass, and pushing the cigars across to him.

Selecting a weed, Hawthorne said interrogatively:

"Remember the Alister murder case?"

"Quite well," I returned; "the owner of Mortimer Lodge, Colonel Alister, awoke one night hearing a strange noise proceeding from his study. He rose at once, and, donning a dressing-gown, went downstairs, entered the room, and found Mr. James Harman, burglar, endeavouring to force open a small safe in which the Colonel kept his valuables. Naturally, Alister resented Mr. Harman's intrusion and endeavoured to capture him, but the burglar, having once tasted the delights of penal servitude and not wishing for a repetition of them, shot the Colonel, and made good his escape.

"Alarmed by the report of firearms, the servants rushed into the room, and found their master lying mortally wounded upon the floor. Medical aid, prompt though it was to arrive, availed nothing, and the Colonel expired in a few minutes, after giving a brief description of his murderer.

"Doubtless Harman fancied himself safe, but, unfortunately for his security, the detective who took up the case was named John Hawthorne. As a natural result after a two months' chase upon the Continent James Harman stood in the dock at the Old Bailey and heard himself sentenced to death.

"There you are," I concluded airily. "Is not that the Alister murder case in a nutshell?"

"Rather a large nutshell," replied Hawthorne, laughing. "However, that has but little to do with my story, which commences on the night before Harman's execution.

"The month was November, and a dense fog hung over the river as I made my way along the Embankment to my home in Chelsea. Though wearing a thick overcoat the cold was so intense that I shivered; yet, despite the unpleasant nature of the weather, I felt exceedingly happy, for the capture of Harman meant my receiving the £100 reward offered by the Government, and also, in all probability, a speedy promotion for, as our chief phrased it, 'my devilish smart arresting of Harman.'

"As I neared Waterloo Bridge, a seemingly one-armed man stepped up to me, and holding out a box of matches implored me to purchase it, whining out a piteous tale of non-employment owing to an accident that had caused the loss of his right arm. He was an old man, grey-bearded and raggedly dressed, but, owing to the dense gloom, I could see no more of him or I should have probably acted very differently.

"As it was, I felt exceedingly sorry for the poor fellow, and, unbuttoning my overcoat, made a search for a few coppers that would provide him with a night's lodging. Muttering thanks and blessings, he came close up to me, looking pitiable with his bent shoulders, and the empty coat-sleeve fastened across the breast of his ragged coat.

"But just as I was about to hand him the money, his figure suddenly straightened, I saw a bare, muscular arm bent back above his head, and before I could move a step or raise my hands to defend myself, some weapon—a life-preserver, I think—descended with crushing force upon my head, hurling me backwards, almost insensible.

"I have a vague recollection of being lifted into a cart, of feeling myself bumped and jolted as I was driven away, then came a horrible sensation of falling, a sudden shock, and—oblivion.

II

"A dull, throbbing pain at my head, a sense of horrible numbness in my limbs—these were my first impressions as consciousness returned to me.

"Wearily opening my eyes, I saw, a few feet above me, a ceiling, black with age, and crumbling to pieces in many places.

"Wondering as to my situation, I made an effort to rise, but sank back with a gasp, a sharp agony at wrists and ankles telling me that I was firmly bound with cords.

"Bound hand and foot! What did it mean? Where was I? I could not understand, but gradually as the pain at my head, caused by the heavy blow I had received, abated, I began to think more clearly, and in a few minutes had become fully aware of my position.

"I lay stretched upon an old horsehair couch, my arms firmly bound beneath my back, while my ankles were fastened together so tightly that the slightest movement of the limbs was impossible. I could move my head, however, and, wondering for what reason I had been secured in this way, proceeded to take stock of my present abiding-place.

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"It was a small room, poorly furnished with a common deal table, a couple of rickety chairs, and the couch upon which I lay. One small window, destitute of blind or curtains, faced me, and beyond its six grimy panes of glass I could see the air was quite dark, indicating that the long November night had not yet given place to day. The only illumination of which the apartment could boast came from a paraffin lamp standing in the centre of the deal table before mentioned.

"After noting these details, and wondering again why I had been brought to this place, I began to grow impatient, for my position, with almost my entire weight resting upon my arms, was a most uncomfortable one.

"Finally my impatience culminated in an angry shout of 'Hullo!'

"Immediately I heard a door behind me open, and someone entered the room. I looked partly round, and by the light of the lamp saw a man of about sixty, tall, grey-bearded, and very powerfully built.

"I recognised him at once as the man who had waylaid me on the Embankment, but somehow I felt sure that I had seen his face some years ago.

'His features were regular, and even handsome in their formation, but they were now marred by a most sinister expression, and his eyes, as they gazed down upon me, bore a look of triumphant malice.

"'So you've woke up, guv'nor,' said he sneeringly. 'Hope you've passed a good night.'

"'What is the meaning of this?' I demanded angrily. 'How dare you entrap me!'

"'Ha, ha!' interposed the man, with a chuckle. 'Clever idea, that arm business, wasn't it? Took you in finely, guv'nor, didn't it, eh? Ha, ha!'

"'Confound you,' I shouted, for his taunts struck home, 'release me or it will be worse for you.'

"'Oh, will it?' he answered mockingly. 'Sorry I can't oblige you. Am afraid you'll have to stop as you are.

'"But come, guv'nor,' he continued, as I was about to speak, 'you don't seem to recognise me. Don't you recollect Dick Taggart?'

"I knew him then in a moment as a notorious 'fence,' or receiver of stolen goods, whom I had seen sentenced, some nine years back, to a long term of penal servitude. But why had he pounced upon me? I had not been connected with his arrest. I was mystified, but the man's next words contained a terrible explanation.

"'I see you remember me,' he went on, 'but Taggart's not my name. My real name's Harman, and——' here he came closer to me, and his voice sank to a hissing whisper—'Jim Harman is my son.'

"'Your son,' I repeated, in amazement, 'your son?'

"'Yes, my son,' he answered, his eyes glaring ferociously at me. 'My son, whom you've hunted down and brought to the gallows. Curse you. But you shall be avenged, Jim, you shall be avenged, I swear it.'

"My situation was revealed now as one of the greatest peril.

"Helpless in the power of this man, unable to stir hand or foot, I quickly realised in what frightful danger I was of having my life sacrificed to satisfy the revenge of Jim Harman's father.

"After a pause, during which I endeavoured to think of some plan for escape, Harman spoke again, and now his voice was broken with emotion.

"'Ah! you don't know how proud I was of my boy; how I loved him—scoundrel though I was—with all my heart; how I endeavoured to save him from following the evil path I chose; how I contrived to spare him the knowledge of what his father was, and how all my plans were thwarted by my arrest and imprisonment.

"'When I came back to freedom, three years ago, it was to find my boy the associate of thieves and already far down the road of crime. But what choice had he? *He* did not have the chances given to his father—a University education, a good position, a handsome salary, all thrown away through sheer folly—no, someone told my boy who and what his father was, and he drifted into the life I had led, his doings culminating with the shooting of Colonel Alister.

"'But,' here the old man's voice rose almost to a scream, 'he never meant to kill him; Jim only wanted to escape. It was you, bloodhound that you are, tracked him down and caused sentence of death to be pronounced upon him.

"'It's the last man-hunt you'll ever do, though,' continued Harman, more quietly, yet with a terrible menace in his voice. He took a watch from his pocket and glanced at it. 'Just half past seven,' said he; 'you have thirty minutes more to live.'

"With these words, the horror of which to me can be imagined, he was gone, closing the door behind him.

"I knew my fate now, but was determined not to die without a struggle. Half-an-hour hence—at eight o'clock, the very time fixed for Jim Harman's execution—I was to be murdered. Rendered desperate by this thought I strained with all my strength to free my hands. I felt the cords cutting into my wrists, yet still I wrenched and tugged at my bonds, until the blood was trickling over my hands. But I persevered, though the agony was terrible and at length succeeded in wrenching free my right hand. Then, though stiff from my captivity, I struggled into a sitting position and, with the cords still dangling from my left wrist, set to work to free my ankles. Oh, for a knife with which to cut the cords, but my pockets were empty, so I was compelled to use my fingers. The deadly peril of my situation lent me strength, but the knots were well tied, and for some minutes I strove in vain to undo them. With finger nails broken and wrists bleeding, I struggled hard, and was just feeling the first knot giving way, when the door suddenly opened, and Harman entered.

"He took in the situation at a glance, and, with a hoarse cry of rage, sprang towards me. As he reached the couch I turned and grappled with him, but in vain, however, did I attempt to overcome my terrible opponent. My ankles being still bound proved a great disadvantage to me, yet I struggled desperately, feeling that I was fighting for my life. With a violent effort, Harman suddenly dragged me off the couch and endeavoured to force me down, but as I fell I came upon my knees and still grappled with him.

"He seemed to have the strength of half-a-dozen men, and I was fast being overpowered, when, in a mad endeavour to throw me backward, he stumbled over one of the chairs and came down with a crash, breaking it into pieces beneath him. I still clung to his wrists, and dragged myself on to him before he could rise to his feet. In a moment I had seized him by the throat and must undoubtedly have won the desperate struggle, when his right hand came in contact with a leg of the broken chair. Using this as a club the ruffian, with a snarl of triumph, dealt me several heavy blows upon the head and shoulders.

"Instantly my hands relaxed their grip, and with a groan of agony, I fell backward upon the floor, insensible.

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III.

"Slowly consciousness returned to me, and I opened my eyes to find myself standing upright, gazing into the malignant face of Harman, who, supporting me in his arms, stood beside me. My head was aching terribly, and in addition to being bound hand and foot, a towel had been tied tightly over my mouth so that I found it impossible to utter a sound.

"Upon seeing that I had recovered my senses, Harman released his grip upon my shoulders, saying with a taunting laugh:

"'Stand steady, guv'nor, and look around. See where you are?'

"Wonderingly I turned my head, but was stopped sharply by something tightening about my throat.

"Good Heavens! A rope was noosed around my neck.

"I looked back at Harman, and saw that a most horrible grin was distorting the old ruffian's face.

"'Don't you like a hempen collar?' he asked with a chuckle, then, his face changing suddenly to a look of diabolical rage, he hissed: 'Ten minutes more and you swing.' So saying, he disappeared out of my line of sight, and then I saw that I was standing upon a large table, while, looking upward, I could see that the end of the rope around my throat had been fastened to a beam that ran across the room, a few inches below the ceiling.

"An awful fear fell upon my heart. To be brutally murdered by strangulation! Great Heavens! What would become of my wife and children? At thought of them I made desperate endeavours to free myself but my efforts were useless.

"'Ha! ha!' came Harman's voice to my ears, 'you can wriggle, but you won't undo those ropes this time, so you may as well leave off trying.'

"His tauntingly spoken words were only too true, and I gave up attempting to free my hands. I was helpless, absolutely helpless, in the power of this man, who, maddened by his thirst for revenge, would, I knew, show me no mercy.

"Of my thoughts during the next few minutes I will not speak. I could hear Harman alternately chuckling and groaning, and knew the man to be mad, but the rope was fastened too tightly for me to turn and look at him, and as I gazed straight ahead, I could see through the open door into the room in which I first had found myself. I saw the old couch, the single rickety chair, and the fragments of its fellow lying upon the floor, but the deal table had been moved, and I guessed, instinctively, that I was now standing upon it! At the grimy window the faint light of a foggy morning was just visible, and I felt my blood turn to ice as I thought that this was to be my last day on earth!

"Just then Harman uttered a cry.

"'Three minutes more,' he shouted, 'three minutes more, and it'll be eight o'clock—eight o'clock! Ah!

"'And he—and he,' Harman went on, his voice rising to a scream, 'he'll die then. Curse you—curse you—you shall die with him. But think of the difference. Scientific apparatus will be used for him—he'll be dead instantly—no pain—nothing. But you—you shall die by inches, and I myself will witness your dying agonies, and gloat over them as I remember my revenge—my revenge. Ha! ha! ha!'

"His laugh was horrible to hear, but I had resigned myself to my fate now, for I felt that I was doomed. Doomed! For what? Because in the execution of my duty I had captured a dangerous ruffian who had committed a cowardly murder. Oh, my God. What an awful death would be mine!

"Suddenly Harman shrieked out: 'Listen, listen! Eight o'clock, eight o'clock!'

"It was so. From some church close by the sound of a clock striking the hour came with terrible distinctness to my ears. Presently Harman began to count: 'One, two, three, four, five, six, seven—Ah! Eight—eight!'

"A second's pause, then he broke out with: 'Jim—oh! Jim! My boy, my boy!'

"His voice died off in sobs, but suddenly, with a frightful oath, I heard him dash forward until he stood within my line of sight.

"Heavens! How ghastly he looked. With blood-shot eyes that glared ferociously at me, his nostrils dilated, his upper lip curled, showing his yellow teeth, his muscular hands working convulsively, Richard Harman looked horrible enough to terrify the bravest man.

"'Curse you—curse you,' he shrieked. 'Curse you a thousand times for your cowardly man-hunting. Blood-hound that you are—Die!'

"And, with a frenzied yell, he seized the table and dragged it away from beneath my feet.

"A sudden jolt and the rope tightened about my throat. I felt the blood rush to my head, a thousand twinkling lights danced before my eyes.

"Then came visions of green fields, of lovely flowers and trees. I was wandering in magnificent gardens, when, as from afar off, there sounded on my ears a piercing shriek, a flash of bright red flame blazed before my eyes—then all grew dark and I knew no more.

* * * * *

"'By Jove, what a narrow squeak, but he's coming round now, doctor,' I heard a well-known, hearty voice say, and opening my eyes I saw Forrester's handsome face bending over me. I felt very weak, and my body ached all over, but some brandy partially restored my energies, and in a husky voice I whispered:

"'Where am I? What are you doing here, Forrester?'

"'You're at No. 8, Princess Street, E.—one of Harman's charming abodes,' answered Forrester lightly, 'and I came to arrest the old ruffian, but he's passed beyond earthly justice.'

"'What do you mean?' I asked hoarsely.

"'He's dead,' replied my fellow detective, 'died of heart disease, the doctor here says.'

"'Heavens! what a shock it was to me when, on opening the door, I saw you hanging there, and Harman dancing about, chuckling and muttering to himself in a horrible manner. As we entered (I had brought two policeman with me, for I knew what a tough customer the fellow, old as he was, would prove) Harman uttered a wild yell and fell dead. I cut you down, and had a doctor summoned, but I was afraid we were too late. You are better now, though, aren't you?'

"'Oh, yes,' I returned, and with Forrester's help, contrived to sit up, a shudder passing over me as I saw a form lying prostrate upon the floor, and thought how nearly Harman's vengeance had been accomplished.

* * * * *

"And now," said Hawthorne, as he re-lit his cigar, "you can understand what my feelings were when I heard of my rescuer having been almost murdered. Ah! Poor young Forrester!"

R. J. Beauchamp.

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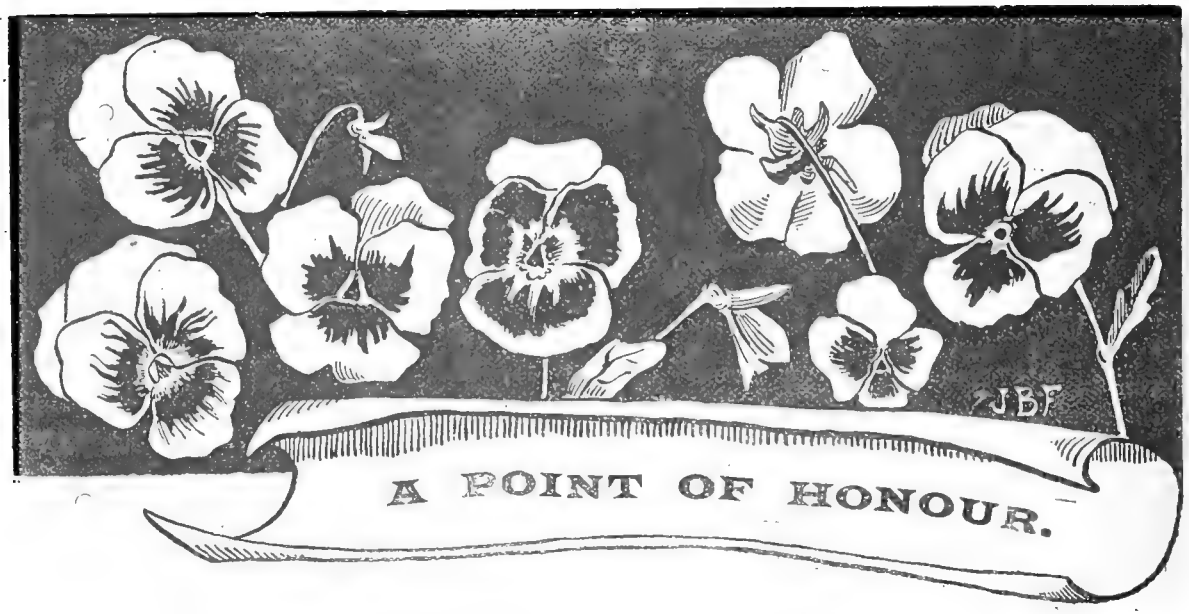

"AND here am I," finished up the big man in the club's biggest chair, "left with this confounded slip of paper in my pocket—'I promise to pay, before the first of July, the sum of three thousand pounds,' while Sainter is travelling as hard as he can to the other end of the world. If I ever meet the fellow again I'll shoot him on sight."

"Better not," said the untidy little man with the scraggy hair, who wrote stories, "he might just be going to pay you. Let me see the paper, will you? 'I promise to pay, before the first of July—' Hallo, where's the date of the year? I declare he's forgotten to put it down. You believe me, old man, he will turn up one of these fine firsts, and pay you every penny. Sainter is a man of honour."

The lawyer opposite chuckled, and rubbed his hands

"It is a nice point," he exclaimed, "a very nice point."

"Isn't it?" said the writer. He was thoughtful for a moment, and then he left the room.

The next evening he came into the club with a jaunty step, and a roll of manuscript in his pocket. The men knew what that meant, and began talking hurriedly so as not to give him a chance.

"I wonder what old Sainter's doing," said the big man.

"I have been thinking," said the lawyer, who had thrown himself back in his chair and was looking at the ceiling, "about that point that was raised last night."

"So have I," said the writer, 'in fact I've written a little story about it."

He unfolded his manuscript, and without a blush, began reading it out.

* * * * *

There was a commotion in Scratch Gravel on the morning of June 23rd, 1875. Jack Langworthy, a local celebrity, had killed a tenderfoot, and there was naturally some curiosity, not to say excitement, over the affair. The circumstances of the case were this: Jack and the tenderfoot were having a little game of cards, when the former noticed a slight deception on the part of his adversary in the way of dealing himself from one to four cards too many and concealing them in his coat sleeve.

"Sich proceedings are entirely foreign to the customs of this yere camp," finally remarked Langworthy, and at the same time sent a pistol-shot into the tenderfoot. The ball passed diagonally through the head from the base of his left ear, and, ranging downwards, made a final entrance into the side of a whisky barrel, which stood in one corner of the room.

"You'll lose some of yer whisky if you don't regulate the hole I've just made in that 'ere barrel," quietly remarked Jack to the proprietor of the place, adding parenthetically, "and it's good liquor, too."

As for the tenderfoot—well, he was dead.

The rude law of Scratch Gravel took cognisance of the fact, and also of the manner of his death, and Jack was arrested. A few weeks later he was arraigned for the murder, and pleaded guilty. The Judge sentenced him to be hanged. Then Jack made a speech. Among other things, he said:

"I killed the man, I know, and perhaps it's fair enough that I should die too. Leastwise, I don't set up my judgment agin that of the Court. The laws of Scratch Gravel should be inforced, but just now I'm sort o' sorry the inforcement is necessary. The deal is a hard one, and the worst of it all is that the roughness is not agin me alone—oh, no, not agin me, but Sally and the twins. I don't care for myself—just as soon go as not—but when I think of the twins I think—I think, by mighty! I'll have to tell you I can't stand it. You see, the twins are boys—both boys—and they are a fine pair an' no mistake. I allers reckoned on the twins mounting to something in the world, but if their father is to be hanged—that settles it. What would the twins ever amount to then? Now, if I could go some other way it wouldn't look so bad—the twins might pull through—but to be strung up like a common thief, it would be a weight on them 'ere twins that 'ud keep 'em down for ever. So you see it ain't for myself that I care—not fer

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me and not fer Sally so much, either, although I do kinder like the old gal—but the twins. Well, it breaks me all up to think of leaving 'em, it does for a certain fact. Jedge, when will the performance take place?"

The unfortunate man was informed that the 10th of July was the date fixed for his execution, and that he should make preparations to be on hand at that time punctually, so as not to delay the proceedings.

"You see, Jack," said the Judge familiarly, "we ain't goin' to be mean enough to lock you up, not you—it wouldn't be right—not with an honourable man like you. It ain't fer any dislike fer you or bad feeling that we're going to hang you, Jack, but it's the law, you know, the law. So you'll make it a point of honour, Jack, to be on hand when the time comes."

For the next week Jack stayed at home nearly all the time. Occasionally some of his friends would drop in to ask about his health and the health of the twins. The slightest mention of the latter would set his tongue in motion, and somehow he seemed to think there were no other children in the world worth talking about.

"They'll pull way ahead of their old dad in a few years," he had often said. "Maybe one of 'em 'll be an auctioneer or a bank president, and the other a steam-boat captain—who knows? Them twins are smart."

It was the month of June. Wonderfully bright the sun shone, wonderfully sweet the birds sang, wonderfully grey and bare and cold were the distant mountains. It seemed to Jack that all creation was smiling over his misfortune and mocking him for a coward who was afraid to die.

One evening, just a week prior to the date fixed for his execution, he seated himself on a boulder near his cabin door and took the twins in his arms. The little fellows climbed all over him. One of them put his brown arm round the paternal neck and pulled the grizzly hair and beard with his chubby fingers. Then looking into the upturned face, he said sorrowfully:

"There's water in your eyes, daddy. What's the matter?"

Jack put the child down rather roughly, and remarking as he brushed his eyes, that the "'skeeters war mighty troublesome that evening," he walked into the house.

The 10th of July arrived. In the morning, quite early, Bill Drake, an old-time friend of Jack's, came to see him.

"Seems like thar ought to be some way to get out of this," remarked Bill.

"I'd just as soon go," said Jack, half apologetically, "ef it wasn't fer the twins. You see, I've sort o' banked on them twins fer a long while. I reckon thar'll be a good turn out at the gallus, Bill."

"You wouldn't slip away, would you, Jack?" whispered Bill, with a strange light in his eyes.

Jack reached for his revolver.

"I don't want to shoot you, Bill," he said fiercely, "but I'll do it, sure, if ye repeat that insult. Thought ye knew me better than that. I'm ashamed of ye."

"But you don't understand me!" exclaimed Bill excitedly. "Listen! The Jedge sentenced ye to be hanged the 10th of July, *but he forgot to name the year!* The 10th of July ten years from now will do, or longer. He only said the 10th of July!"

"But he meant to-day," said Jack, trembling in every limb.

"But he didn't say it. You may suit your own convenience about the year, Jack. For yer own sake, and for the sake of the twins, skip."

There was much disappointment that afternoon among the citizens of Scratch Gravel when it was discovered that Jack was gone. A search was made of his cabin, but there were no signs of Sally, Jack, or the twins. They were all gone for good.

And now comes the strangest part of this story. The 10th of July five years later a grey old man, bent nearly double, thrust his shadowy form into the presence of the chief magistrate of Scratch Gravel, and demanded a hearing.

"I am Jack Langworthy," he said, "and I have come back according to promise to be hanged. You see, the twins are dead—both dead, and Sally, she's gone too—ran away with another man, and now I've come back to meet the requirements of the law. There has been some delay, I'll admit, but I was bound to come back some time, and here I am."

The laws and customs of Scratch Gravel had changed somewhat since Jack departed from the place five years before, and as the affair in which he was interested was no longer a sensation of the day, he was simply told to leave the town as soon as possible. He went at once, and the last seen of him alive he was tramping slowly out of town with his face towards the setting sun.

A little later in the year, when the chapparel bushes began to shed their leaves and the vines that tumbled over the grey rocks were touched with frost, the fleshless frame of a man was found suspended from a rock over a deep ravine.

It was Jack Langworthy.

* * * * *

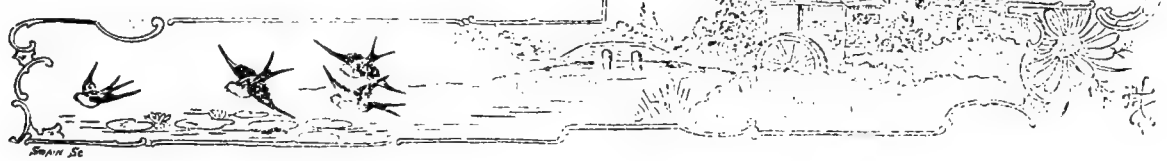
The author looked up with a smile of triumph.

"You see," he said, "Sainter may turn up one day——"

But the room was empty.

GRACE HAWKER.

New Serial Story by George C. Wallis will shortly commence in *S.S.* It will deal with the lost Island of Atlantis, and be of the most exciting interest.



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KEY TO JUMBLED STORY No. 7.]

THE AUTHOR OF "DREAMS."

I HAVE always taken a particular interest in the toilers of the street.

I watch them as they stand on the pavement and shiver in their rags; as the fierce rain pours down on their ill-clad bodies. Some of them have their stories.

I once knew one of these miserables who had an Eton and Christ Church education, and who had won by his brain almost every honour it had been possible to obtain.

And what is more this man was the author of "Dreams," that is to say he was the writer of one of the finest works that ever mortal penned.

For twenty years I had known him to be selling matches at his position in Fleet Street without missing a day.

During that time I had become so acquainted with him that occasionally I persuaded him to take me to his rooms in a back slum off the Strand.

I would bring him a bottle of port, or some of my old whisky, and we would light a fire and chat together.

It was a sultry day in July when I noticed that for the first time the old man was absent from his post; a friendly policeman, whom I cultivated, informed me that the old match-seller had been taken ill on the previous day.

I made a few purchases, and went round to his room.

As I was going up the rickety staircase, a strange thing happened.

A tall, well-dressed man was coming down, wearing a long black coat.

He had a mass of dark wavy hair hanging on his shoulders, a white face, with high, intellectual-looking forehead.

It was the reputed author of "Dreams!"

I pulled my hat over my eyes, and waited until he had passed. Then I ran up to my friend's room.

"Did you see him," he cried, almost before I had entered. "That man who went down? He was my brother."

The old man fell back on the pillows, and seemed exhausted.

My friend noticed the incredulous expression on my face.

Presently he told me his story.

"When Geoffrey and I were young men we worked together in a firm in the City. That was long ago.

"I was ever a dreamer, and, although I plodded away at my work, I was not brilliant. With my brother it was different, and he was soon to be made a partner. I was thinking all day and all night; thinking and dreaming; occasionally I wrote down my thoughts. These were afterwards published in a book. It was called 'Dreams.'

"One day a cheque was missing from our office. It is the old story. I was suspected, although I was not accused; I felt that all eyes were upon me as I went about my duties. I did not mind, for I was thinking about the last chapters of my book.

"I was working in my room one evening, preparing the manuscript for the publishers, when the door opened, and my brother stood before me. I see him now, as he stood there in the open door, and pointed an accusing finger towards me.

"'Thief,' he hissed between his clenched teeth. 'You—a thief. You, a Montgomery, a low down thief!'

"'Geoff,' I cried, 'believe me——"

"He interrupted me with a gesture.

"'It is no good,' he said, 'for you to deny it. I know everything. I have collected proofs. Answer me this: What were you doing at the hour when the cheque was stolen?'

"It was impossible for me to say. I was tongue-tied. Oh, the agony of it! But a woman's honour hung on my silence. You know her, perhaps. The heroine of 'Dreams.'

"'Well,' the old man continued, 'that woman's honour depended on my silence. And so I could answer nothing. I was entirely in my brother's power. By speaking he could ruin me. My career, not yet begun, would be cut off. I fell at his feet.

"'I will give you everything that I possess,' I cried in an agony of fear. 'You may have anything that you ask for. I will sell you my soul——'

"'Pish!' he interrupted brutally. 'I would not rob the Devil. There is only one way by which you may be saved.'

"I looked up eagerly. Anything that would prevent inquiry, and preserve a woman's honour—you know her I think you said, she was the heroine of 'Dreams'—there could be no price too high to pay for that.

"'There is only one way by which you may be saved,' my brother repeated. 'There is only one thing that I will take from you. That is—your book.'

"The old man pressed his hand to his forehead.

"I went to a drawer in my table, and handed him the manuscript.

"He took it, and without a word left the room.

"My surprise may be imagined when the next morning I received my dismissal from my employers. They suspected me of stealing the cheque. My brother had forgotten to speak for me. But I did not care. Nothing had been found out, and I was shielding a woman's name.

"A few weeks later she passed me in the street. I was selling matches. She looked at me with pity, and then she threw me a copper. I have kept it, you see, in that little velvet case on the wall. It is all that I have to remind me of her.

"You saw the man who went out just now. He was my brother.

"He wanted to know whether I had ever written another book. He said that if I sold it to him he would let me have all the profits. He was very kind and generous. I wonder why?"

This is the match-seller's story, and it seemed to have exhausted him. There is yet the sequel to be told.

It will be remembered that Geoffery Montgomery had published nothing since his one great work. One day he wrote an ode to an actress.

She, poor girl, being in sore need of money, took it to the editor of a certain magazine. He paid her £100 for it, and then spent half his fortune in advertising it.

The magazine was an obscure little publication, but its circulation for the next week was as much as that of all the rest of its kind put together.

It was then found out that the poem was the merest twaddle.

The intensest excitement prevailed in literary circles; vague rumours were spread everywhere, The public demanded that the author of "Dreams" should produce something worthy of his reputation.

It was for this reason that he had applied to his brother. The public are still waiting.

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BY MISS WINIFRED GRAHAM.

Author of "When the Birds Begin to Sing," "Through the Valley," "Six First-class Passengers," etc., etc.

PAUPER BLUE BLOOD.

CHAPTER XX.

At John Reginald's Door.

Sefton was staying with his mother and Eva, when he received an invitation from his uncle, Lord Macphairson, to shoot in Scotland. No mention was made in the letter of Georgina. Sefton was asked alone, just as in his bachelor days.

Had he cherished the slightest regard for his wife or her feelings, he would have resented the slur upon her, and accordingly refused. Instead, it rather pleased him than otherwise—he felt so thoroughly with his uncle for disapproving of the present Lady Ravenscroft.

Lord Macphairson was his mother's only brother, and heartily shared her dislike of the late governess. This raised him in Sefton's eyes, increasing his respect to admiration. There was no humbug in his uncle Oliver, and he accepted the invitation to Laurieston Hall, to the Dowager Lady Ravenscroft's great delight.

"I can't tell you how glad I am you are going," she said. "Of course you know as well as I do how plainly your uncle stated his disapproval of your marriage, but Oliver has always been a good brother to me. I like to think that he and my boy are friends."

Sefton always improved in health when away from Georgina. Her presence seemed to absorb his vitality and, vampire like, bereave him of strength. His brain, too, grew clearer in her absence, and his mother had no idea of the tricks it too frequently played him. As yet his self-control was strong, and he was clever enough to conceal the infirmity that occasionally turned him livid with fear. He could not get over having imagined, as he thought, that never-to-be-forgotten interview with Norah the week before her wedding, and believing it for days together, till facts proved stronger than fiction.

"Of course, it was an illusion of my unhinged intellect," Sefton still told himself persistently.

Norah in the green lane, whispering of love, was no more a creature of flesh and blood than the tall figure of Sir Reginald that had faced him more than once in the study at Ravenscroft Park.

"These little freaks of fancy," he would say in calmer moments, "will land me in a lunatic asylum, if I don't look out. Ghosts!—of course, there are no such things. If I had really seen the spirit of my father when my mind was clear and capable of understanding, I should have fallen dead at his feet. Men do not look on such sights and live!"

This argument was sound enough, and convinced Sefton he occasionally suffered from some malady, probably indigestion.

The day he was leaving for Scotland he received a letter from Georgina, asking him to tell her of his movements.

"If you are not with your mother, let me know," she said, "as it looks odd to my friends if I am ignorant of your whereabouts. We may as well play out the farce to its bitter end, and act the ordinary lukewarm husband and wife, without publishing the fact that now, more than ever, we are strangers. Remember it was not always so, you were only a man and human, and there is a tie between us which will live and grow, year by year, to show that you are mine, and I am yours, the crown of our existence—the child, John Reginald, I hear, is well and thriving. He is not old enough yet to miss his parents. When he comes to years of discretion, which of our two gifts, I wonder, will he value most? The baronetcy he must some day inherit, or the money, which, from his youth up, will bring him the good things of life. We shall see!"

As Sefton crushed the writing in his hand, he felt an ungovernable hatred rise in his heart for John Reginald, because he was not only his child, but Georgina's.

It was too late to answer the letter then, but the following day he wrote from Laurieston Hall.

When upon reading his reply it gradually dawned upon his wife's intelligence that Sefton was actually staying with Lord Macphairson, after the slighting manner in which he had treated her, Georgina's anger and annoyance knew no bounds.

Her outraged sensibilities found vent in a furious epistle penned to her husband at Laurieston Hall, and a fit of sulking, under the plea of a headache, that lasted two days.

It was the final straw—a challenge to Georgina. He had practically snapped his fingers in her face—cast her off—divorced her from her wifehood. She would show him that she could return blow for blow, insult for insult. She was now the stronger of the two, and was under no obligation to her husband.

Henceforth they should be worse than strangers—foes, enemies—each fighting for the upper hand. Georgina's blood boiled, and though she wished her husband dead, she still did not regret having married him.

"Cousin John would never have left me his fortune," she said, "if I had not been Lady Ravenscroft."

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The long rigmarole of abuse, emphasised by dashes and ink blots, was opened by Sefton while dressing for dinner in a luxurious apartment at Lauriston Hall. Already the evenings were turning cold, and a cheerful fire blazed in his grate. It was pleasant to be valeted and waited on again hand and foot, to meet old friends and acquaintances who had never even seen Georgina, so did not remind him of her existence by asking after Lady Ravenscroft or her son. His wife was never mentioned in the Macphairson family, and most people believed the Ravenscrofts were separated, or that he kept his wife hidden away, because she was an impossible creature—quite unpresentable!

Before Sefton went down he commended Georgina's execrations to the flames, and banished all thoughts of her from his mind. He knew a party from Castle Dermott was coming to dinner that evening, but had not heard the names of the expected guests previously mentioned.

The drawing-room was full of people as he entered, but it was not till he had glanced round several times that a girlish figure, surrounded by a group of men, attracted his attention. They were hanging on her words, and the sparkling flow of conversation rippling from the beautiful lips seemed vaguely familiar in tone to Sefton's astonished ear.

Her face was turned away, but even as he looked she moved, and a striking profile, well-known, dimmed Sefton's vision. A sudden mist rose before his eyes, and then a voice said at his side:

"May I introduce you to the Duchess of Malvern?"

Norah glanced up and saw him. In a moment the scene flashed before her—of Sir Sefton riding by as she drove beneath the triumphal arch on her wedding afternoon. He, too, remembered the chilling stare he gave her in return for a shy bow and half-hesitating smile. The idea of cutting Norah! His conscience reproached him strongly for his ungentlemanly action.

A moment later he advanced with outstretched hand and greeted the young Duchess in the old friendly strain.

"Why, Sefton!" she cried. "I had no idea you were here," colouring to the very roots of her hair, and then paling as white as her gown.

What a traitor he must think her—what a truthless, weak, unstable flirt!

She moved across the room to a sofa, leaving her other friends and keeping her eyes fixed in openly expressed wonder on Sefton as he talked without constraint.

"How do you like married life, Norah?" he asked in an undertone.

A bright smile broke over her face, it was impossible not to see that she was happy.

"It is quite delightful! I've been having a splendid time. Victor is truly the ideal husband, as far as giving me my head goes. I do just the maddest things imaginable, and he never minds. He is such a nice boy! You see a husband replaces or does away with a chaperon. We are like a set children let loose at Malvern Court. All our friends are young, and we scorn conventionality. I never knew how beautiful it was to be alive until this last summer."

Then remembering how heartless her words must seem, she checked her effervescing spirits.

"You have forgiven me, Sefton," she said, gazing at him pleadingly. "I'm not worth being angry with, and nobody troubles about me, or takes me seriously."

"Forgiven!" he said, "why of course you are forgiven. It is so long ago since you wrote that letter, such a very old score, that it has worn out before now."

Norah was perplexed. What letter could he mean? she had never written since her faithlessness the day his child was born.

But before she could question him, the signal for dinner broke their conversation, a general move was made, and Lord Macphairson offered the Duchess his arm.

Later on, however, when an opportunity arose, Sefton lured Norah into the conservatory, on the pretext of admiring the flowers. His curiosity about himself made silence impossible, and he put the question to her straightly:

"Tell me, Norah, did you meet me about a week before your wedding, in the road outside the gates of Rosemont? Did you promise to break your engagement with the Duke of Malvern? Answer me honestly, yes or no?"

He expected a look of unutterable surprise, and in this he was not disappointed.

Norah gave a little gasp of abject amazement before replying wonderingly:

"How can you ask me? You must know!"

He shook his head. Then with a quick insight into the truth as she caught his puzzled look, and read the confused thoughts that were groping after light, Norah spoke:

"Yes. We met, and I vowed falsely, but as I live I *meant* to fulfil my promise at the time."

Sir Sefton shook from head to foot.

"Then why did you not?" he asked fiercely, every incident returning with vivid distinctness.

Norah's eyes fell—her lips trembled slightly.

"I heard your child was born—you had him—you had your wife. Was it not enough? A strange revulsion of feeling rushed over me. Why should you ruin my career? I argued. What right had you to come between me and the man to whom I had pledged my word? They talked of your son and heir that night at dinner—how pleased you would be—what joy he would bring in the Ravenscroft household. I was nothing in your life; by your marriage you had thrust me out beyond your reach. I had broken enough hearts. I stayed my hand at Victor's."

A look of love stole into Norah's eyes as she mentioned her husband's name.

The Duke had conquered the frivolous affections of his wife *after* marriage, and Sefton had lost them for ever. He stood now regarding the Duchess of Malvern gloomily, with jealousy and despair in his face.

Her words had made the recollection of his son bitter to him. So John Reginald came between them just at the crucial moment. John Reginald was to blame for Norah's sudden change. But for his interference she might still have been Norah Cannington, faithful to the memory of their past love, mourning for the heart she so ruthlessly destroyed. He laid his whole grievance at the door of that innocent babe!

The old pangs of misery returned tenfold as the fascination of the fair Duchess's presence wove its deadly web.

"What is he like?" she asked.

"Who?" answered Sefton vaguely.

"The child."

"Oh! I don't know. I have not seen him half-a-dozen times, except at a distance."

Norah experienced a wave of shocked astonishment and disgust.

"You cannot love him, then?"

"There is nothing worth looking at in a bundle of white clothes and a small, indescribable face. I am told he resembles my father, but I see no likeness save a very strong one to my wife."

Sefton laid his hand on Norah's arm as she turned to go.

"I wish to heaven I had not seen you to-night," he muttered. "You are making a devil of me."

"I don't understand," she answered, rearing her head.

"Yes, a devil, Norah, a man who loathes his child, and curses his wife."

She shrank back. His words appalled her. She was accustomed to the rose paths of life, and the prick of thorns was strange and hurtful.

She walked slowly towards the drawing-room, where Lord Macphairson's daughter was singing in a rich contralto. Yet through the passionate accents of her stirring voice, and the wail of a pianissimo accompaniment, the Duchess of Malvern only heard that cruel murmur—"a man who loathes his child—and curses his wife!"

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Sefton slept little that night, his brain was too disturbed. He was trying to solve the mystery of his mistaken conclusion in regard to Norah and her broken promise.

"I thought I was mad then, but now I am certain of it," he said, "or I *must* have known! To confuse facts with fancies is worse than confounding fancies with facts. The latter is excusable if the fancies are vivid, the former merely insanity when the facts are plain."

Norah felt saddened by her interview with Sefton, but the effect soon wore off under the cheerful influence of her husband, and the other guests at Castle Dermott. She avoided visiting Laurieston Hall, after the dinner party, and really hoped that chance would not throw Sefton across her life again.

It was so harassing meeting these discarded lovers—especially when her own heart had suffered sorely at Sefton's hands.

Yet he was not the same as in the past; a very noticeable change had come over him. She could not exactly define it, but a dreadful presentiment whispered that the man she had thought so much of was gradually losing the hold and stay of reason, which would leave him disarmed and defenceless on the battlefield of life.

CHAPTER XXI.

Her Ruling Hand.

Sefton, having no desire to rejoin his wife, prolonged his visit in Scotland, and afterwards went to Ermyn Way.

Georgina ceased corresponding with him, only letting him know by wire six weeks later that she had returned to Ravenscroft Park.

The thought of his home grew daily more distasteful; but eventually a short pencilled note aroused him from these happy-go-lucky hours of leisure to the stern realities of life.

He read it twice before he could fully grasp its meaning.

"You must not return later than the 20th," she wrote, "as I have a large ball, to which all the county people are coming. You see, they are willing enough to take my hospitality now that I am rich, or perhaps they accepted out of sheer curiosity. I think I shall open their eyes.—Your wife, Georgina."

Lady Ravenscroft was correct in her surmise anent curiosity. No one approved of Sir Sefton's wife, but they could not resist her invitation.

"Won't it be nice meeting at Ravenscroft Park again?" they said. "Just like the old days! We could not hurt poor dear Sir Sefton's feelings by refusing. It's really quite a charity to go—his wife has been so cold-shouldered!"

Sefton knew Georgina's hospitality would be received with condescension, and the thought maddened him. At first he decided not to be present, but his pride overcame his momentary inclination. Why should he publish their estrangement to the world? The name of Ravenscroft must be guarded; the tongues of scandal should not be set wagging by his voluntary action. He had sacrificed himself for the family honour, and must bear his burden to the end. His father's last written command ran still in his head. He heard it repeated in the night watches. All the dead Ravenscrofts rose from the family vault to group themselves about his bed. Some of them spoke bitter truths. They whispered that the noble strain was tainted, reminding him that the blood of a Pluff ran in the veins of his heir. He would awake in a burning fever, crying aloud John Reginald's name.

Georgina's independence was a fresh anxiety. It staggered him to hear she had arranged this ball, and sent out the invitations without consulting him. Why, last time he was at Ravenscroft Park it was a funeral! now he must return to dancing, music and frivolity.

"I've got my marching orders," he said to Douglas Shirling, with a gloomy smile. "My wife is giving a ball next week, and this is the first I have heard of it."

He folded the letter, and lit a cigar, with an ill-acted air of unconcern.

"Really," replied Douglas, raising his eyebrows, but purposely speaking in a cheerful tone, "that's rather in your line; you used to be fond of dancing."

"My dear fellow, what I 'used to be' is quite a different matter. Fate has danced all energy out of me."

As Sefton spoke Dr. Merriman joined them and the subject dropped. He heard these last words, however, and when Sefton eventually went off to answer his wife's letter, he turned to Douglas with an abrupt question.

"What's the matter with that chap?"

"Oh, home worries and general depression all round! His wife is rather a trial."

"Ah!" said the sceptical young doctor, rubbing his clean-shaven chin. "These giddy young wives go a step too far occasionally without knowing exactly what they are doing. I should advise Lady Ravenscroft to look out, or her husband will go off his head."

"I say, Merriman, you don't mean that—you're only gassing!"

"Not at all. That's the very last subject I should joke about. I'm making a special study of the brain."

Douglas was silent. He did not like his friend's tone. It was too genuine for chaff.

"Poor beggar!" he said at last. "What an awful thought!"

"I say, Douglas!"

It was Sefton's voice calling him from the library door.

"Yes."

"You'll come back with me for this show?"

He joined Sefton, and closed the door.

"I'm awfully sorry; I wish I could."

"Why can't you?"

"I am booked for the Blandfords, and I can't throw *them* over."

"No, I suppose not," answered Sefton dolefully, knowing that in the face of such an engagement persuasions or arguments could not prevail, Douglas Shirling being head over ears in love with pretty Dolly Blandford.

"You see, Sef, old man," he continued confidentially; "I am going to try my luck this time."

Sefton grasped his friend's hand and wrung it sincerely.

"You will win her," he said in a perfectly confident tone; "and she'll make you a ripping little wife!"

Then he went back to the writing table, and finished his letter to Georgina.

It was with mixed feelings of excitement and resentment that Lady Ravenscroft awaited her husband's coming. Excitement because she had transformed Ravenscroft Park to her liking—resentment because she could not forgive his visit to Laurieston Hall.

She posed herself in a lazy, lounging attitude on a low divan in the drawing-room, which had been entirely redecorated. Superfluous gilt gleamed in brazen profusion everywhere, while the gaudy blue chairs from Queen's Gate House reared their obtrusive shoulders under the beflowered ceiling.

She could hear the carriage wheels on the drive, the loud clanging of the bell, but she did not rise or go downstairs to meet her husband. She was wondering how the footmen in their powder and silk stockings would impress him.

At last came footsteps up the stairs, the door was flung open by one of the new menservants, who announced to Sir Sefton: "Her ladyship is in the drawing-room."

Was it his old home, this flashy apartment he had always associated with the gentle presence of his mother and her household gods? He felt like a stranger in his own domain. The bright paperings on the walls of the hall and staircase gave the place a tawdry air, instead of its stately old-world appearance, which in the past appealed so forcibly to Sefton's romantic nature.

Georgina gave him her hand, and said: "How are you?"

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stiffly, as if addressing a casual acquaintance who had dropped in for afternoon tea.

He waited till the door closed, then his eyes roved round at will.

"Pretty, isn't it?" said Georgina, hoping he was lost in admiration.

"I can't say I admire your taste," he replied. "You've ruined the room! I should hardly know the place, it is so altered, and the whole looks positively vulgar!"

"I thought you would say something pleasant," she sneered. "But I can't wonder at anything after the open insult you offered me in visiting your uncle, Lord Macphairson."

"Tell me, who is coming to the ball?" he asked.

"*Everybody!*" and an exultant light flashed in her eyes. "See, here is the list."

She handed him a sheet of foolscap. He ran his eye over the names in silent astonishment. So his wife spoke truly, and had forced herself on to Society by the aid of the golden calf.

"I can't remember if I told you it is to be a fancy-dress ball."

Sir Sefton started.

"I hope you don't expect *me* to dress myself up like a popinjay?"

"Of course you must be in costume. I have ordered a dozen different dresses from town for you to choose from, hired ones, but of the best."

"If I'd known, upon my word I would have left you to hold your revels alone. It is perfectly ridiculous, a set of grown-up people decking themselves out like children, and fooling about."

"Well, your friends quite appreciate the fun; I hear it has caused no end of talk and amusement. Not everybody is so staid and stupid as you! I think the house is immensely improved, and I want to give it a show. Besides, a fancy dress ball is more likely to be noticed by the papers. I have sent the names of the guests to some of the most fashionable periodicals."

Sefton said nothing. He felt abjectly, stonily miserable. His home disgusted him now as much as his wife. The objects familiar in his childhood had been crowded out by John Pluff's modern furniture, all things spoke of Georgina. Her ruling hand was visible at every turn.

When eventually the day of the dance arrived, Sefton felt like a guest in his own home, having been consulted in none of the arrangements. He did not even know what costume his wife would wear.

During the afternoon she asked him which dress he had selected.

"I sent them all back," he replied.

Georgina's brow darkened.

"You are surely not going to spoil the effect by your ordinary evening clothes?"

Sefton smiled a little oddly.

"Oh, no," he said.

She could get nothing more out of him.

The Humpherys had been invited to stay; but this also was not previously mentioned.

Sir Sefton received them courteously, but more than ever felt as if he were on a very boring visit with unpleasant people not congenial to him.

"My dress is divinely picturesque," Georgina confided to Mrs. Humphery. "I'm going to receive all these swell folks in rags, but most bewitching tatters, for all that. I may be an ordinary, commonplace woman, without any looks to boast of, but at least to-night I will be beautiful."

Georgina prophesied truly about herself. She had studied her face for hours before creating her make-up.

She brushed her hair as flatly down as possible, and donned an exquisitely curling black wig, flowing almost to her feet. She had sent it back three times before it suited her to perfection. Then with the addition of rouge, dark eyelashes and rose-leaf powder, Georgina felt she could hold her own amongst the youngest and prettiest girls.

"I feel I've got twice the cheek and the go in me," she told Mrs. Humphery, "when I am touched up. But wait a moment," as her friend went into raptures over the gown, "I am not a true gipsy yet."

She whispered something to her maid, and the girl left the room. A moment later she returned with John Reginald in a basket, his poor little face stained brown, yet wrapped in unconscious slumber. This she slung upon Lady Ravenscroft's back.

An exclamation of delight broke from Mrs. Humphery.

"What a lovely idea!" she cried, "and how sweet that infant looks! Are you going to receive with him across your shoulders?"

"Rather! Is it not a novelty? and such a chance to show off the heir."

"But dear, he will wake to a moral, and cry the house down."

"Oh! no; he won't," replied Georgina confidently, giving Mrs. Humphery a knowing wink. "The basket is all cushioned and comfortable, as good as if he were in his cot."

"Still the talking and the music must rouse him."

"No," drawing her friend aside and speaking in an undertone. "I had a little soothing, and quite harmless, mixture put in his bottle. He will sleep like a top, the darling, till mother has done with him."

Even Mrs. Humphery drew down her lips and looked shocked.

"Drugged!" she murmured, touching the unconscious child.

But John Reginald seemed to smile in his sleep, and his breathing was peaceful and even.

"Was it not a good idea?" said Lady Ravenscroft, as she sailed downstairs.

She met her husband in the hall. For a moment she stared at him in silent horror, then the words broke from her parched lips in deadly terror: "Sefton, is that *you?*"

He stood so still she could hardly believe he was alive. On the wall hung a painting of Sir Reginald in fancy dress (the costume of a courtier), beneath it his son in the very same garments and wig which long ago had been laid away in sacred remembrance of the dead. That he should have unearthed the clothes and appeared in them to-night horrified Georgina. Tears started to her eyes, for in this pale-faced apparition she saw again her lover of the past.

He watched her emotion with a smile on his hard lips. It pleased him to think he had pained her, as she drew back, and gazed reproachfully upon the faded lace. He glanced from his wife to his child, and thought of Norah. John Reginald's birth had dispelled the love that was still his, and made the wavering girl the wife of another man.

"Have you no feeling," said Georgina slowly, "that you can make sport of your father's memory?"

"None. John Reginald killed my heart," he answered enigmatically.

"John Reginald? What do you mean?"

She asked the question fiercely. Her eyes, with their darkened lashes, looked splendid in the heat of passion. She raised her hand as if she could have struck that rigid figure masquerading as dead Sir Reginald.

"Better not ask," retorted her husband.

He turned away, leaving Georgina gazing at the life-like portrait beneath which he had planted himself at the foot of the stairs.

(To be continued.)

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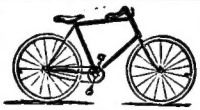

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(Mention this Paper.)

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Post-cards and Letters to be addressed to the

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NERVES AND FIDDLE STRINGS.

I used to hear a man say that when he got excited his nerves were stretched tight as fiddle strings. No doubt he felt so, but as a matter of fact the nerves are as little like fiddle strings as you can imagine. Still, there is a resemblance in the point of general results: Unless the strings are tight and in tune you get no music from the fiddle, and unless your nerves are in good order we get but small comfort in living.

Hence, when Mrs. Ward says: "My nerves became quite unstrung," we shall agree that it is a good comparison. Yet what malignant power was it that unstrung those white cords wherein depend all our feelings and movements? Possibly we may gather the answer from Mrs. Ward's letter:

"A short time before Christmas, 1889," she goes on to say, "my health began to give way. It was not easy at first to say just what ailed me. In answer to questions of my friends I could only say that I felt tired, fagged, and weary. All my energy and ambition were gone out of me. I did a little work from necessity and habit, but took no interest in it. My appetite had usually been good, but now it failed, until I not only had no desire for food—I loathed the very sight and smell of it. The few mouthfuls I did eat at any particular time gave me intense pain at the chest and around the sides. After even the simplest meal I felt puffed and blown out.

"I got no proper sleep, and in the morning was more tired and exhausted than when I went to bed. I soon got so weak I could scarcely walk, and if I went only a few yards I felt fit to drop down. My nerves became quite unstrung, and sounds which ordinarily I would pay no attention to now worried, startled, and upset me. My mind would conjure up all sorts of absurd notions, having no sense or reason in them, yet I suffered much misery from them. I seemed somehow to have lost the protection which healthy people have against small annoyances; and this I knew was on account of my nerves.

"I will merely say that none of the various kinds of medicines that I took had any effect. Eating little or nothing I got thinner and weaker all the time, and month after month it was just the same. To be sure I could get about in a feeble way, which made the contrast between my condition and that of others appear all the more striking and sad to me. At this time we were living at Ash, in Kent.

"Well, one day in April (1890) I called at Mr. Hill's, the grocer, and fell to talking with his wife about my illness, and how discouraged and miserable I was. She listened to my tale, and then said: 'Mrs. Ward, if I were in your place I'd give up everything else and just take Mother Seigel's Syrup.' Then she told me more of what it had done in complaints that acted like mine.

"On this I got a bottle of Mother Seigel's Syrup, and began taking it. In three days I felt so much better I made sure it would finally cure me. My appetite commenced to pick up, and I could eat without having any pain or distress to follow. Every day I was stronger, and I slept better and better at nights. I was coming to be like my old self; my nerves were all right, and the noises and fancies vexed me no more. After taking three bottles of Mother Seigel's Syrup I was well as ever. You are welcome to publish my letter. (Signed) (Mrs.) J. Ward, Maison Dieu House, Dover, July 9th, 1895."

We see now what unstrung this woman's nerves. It was a trouble of the stomach—the disease invariably known as dyspepsia, in which the poisons from the fermenting food in the stomach are carried to every part of the body, the nerves suffering with the rest. The nerves were half starved, too, and no hungry nerves can be sound, strong nerves.

Hence, if we would have healthy nerves we must have a good digestion; and it is by giving us healthy digestion that Mother Seigel's Syrup has come to be so famous as a remedy in nervous complaints.

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